NATION

No rise in medicine prices, says Centre

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

Adani is India's 1st with 10K MW renewable energy capacity

≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Cristiano Ronaldo nets another hat trick in Saudi

≫ Page: 8 ≪

www.twitter.com/EnglishSalar
www.facebook.com/EnglishSalar
www.instagram.com/dailysalarenglish
youtube.com/@dailysalardigital

SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 4 APRIL 2024 | THURSDAY | BENGALURU | 24 RAMADAN, 1445 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 77 | Pages: 8

WE ARE HIRING

SUB-EDITOR
WEB EDITOR

Journalism degree preferred but not essential

Applicants with maximum 2 years of experience preferred. Freshers are encouraged to apply

SEND YOUR CV TO

asma@salar.news
anushreeirwin@gmail.com

World Bank projects Indian economy to grow at 7.5%

WASHINGTON, 3 APRIL

The Indian economy is projected to grow at 7.5 per cent in 2024, the World Bank has said, revising its earlier projections for the same period by 1.2 per cent.

Overall, growth in South Asia is expected to be strong at 6.0 per cent in 2024, driven mainly by robust growth in India and recoveries in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the World Bank said in its latest South Asia Development Update on Tuesday.

According to the report, South Asia is expected to remain the fastest-growing region in the world for the next two years, with growth projected to be 6.1 per cent in 2025.

In India, the World Bank said, economic activity surprised on the upside in 2023Q4, with growth of 8.4 per cent from a year ago. "The expansion was supported by rapid increases in investment and government consumption. More recent survey data point to continued strong performance," it said.

In February, India's composite purchasing managers index (PMI) stood at 60.6, well above the global average of 52.1 (a value above 50 indicates expansion). Growth in FY2023/24 is estimated to have exceeded earlier forecasts, it said.

In India, inflation has remained within the Reserve Bank of India's 2–6 per cent target range since a spike in mid-2023, and the policy rate has remained unchanged since February 2023.

Financial conditions in India have remained accommodative. Domestic credit issuance to the commercial sector (including public and private borrowers) grew by 14 per cent (year-on-year) in December 2023, the fastest pace since 2013. Financial soundness indicators continued to improve.

The nonperforming-loan ratio fell to 3.2 per cent last year, well below its recent peak. The expected slowdown in growth between FY2023/24 and FY2024/25 mainly reflects a deceleration in investment from its elevated pace in the previous year, it said.

—PTI

In India, inflation has remained within the Reserve Bank of India's 2–6 per cent target range **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

7.5 QUAKE ROCKS TAIWAN

The strongest quake in 25 years caused over a 1,000 injuries

HUALIEN, 3 APRIL

The strongest earthquake in a quarter-century rocked Taiwan during the morning rush hour Wednesday, killing nine people, stranding dozens of workers at quarries and sending some residents scrambling out the windows of damaged buildings.

It prompted tsunami warnings for Taiwan as well as Japan

The quake, which also injured more than 1,000, was centred off the coast of rural, mountainous Hualien County, where some buildings leaned at severe angles, their ground floors crushed. Just over 150km away in the capital of Taipei, tiles fell from older buildings, and schools evacuated their students to sports fields, equipping them with yellow safety helmets. Some children covered themselves with textbooks to guard against falling objects as aftershocks continued.

Rescuers fanned out in Hualien, looking for people who may be trapped and using excavators to stabilize damaged buildings. The numbers of people missing, trapped or stranded fluctuated frequently as authorities learned of more in trouble and worked to locate or free them. Some 70 workers who were stranded at two rock quarries were safe, according to the fire agency, but the roads to reach them had been damaged by falling rocks. Six workers were going to be airlifted on Thursday. Taiwan is regularly jolted by quakes and its population is among the best prepared for them, but authorities said they had expected a relatively mild earthquake and accordingly did not send out alerts. A tsunami warning was triggered but later lifted. The quake and aftershocks also caused 24 landslides and damage to roads, bridges and tunnels.

Taiwan's earthquake monitoring agency said the quake was 7.2 magnitude while the aUS Geological Survey put it at 7.4. It struck about 18km off of Hualien, on Taiwan's east coast, and was about 35 kilometres deep. Multiple aftershocks followed. The Japan Meteorological Agency said a tsunami of 30 cm was detected on the coast of Yonaguni island about 15 minutes after the quake struck. *—PTI*

At least 48 buildings were damaged but the death toll was surprisingly low **PHOTO: AP**

Sumalatha to join BJP, won't contest

MANDYA, 3 APRIL

Mandya's independent MP Sumalatha Ambareesh on Wednesday announced that she would join BJP, thereby extending her support to the NDA candidate and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections here.

"I will not leave Mandya and you will see me working for you in the coming days. I have decided to join the BJP," the 60-year-old actor-turned-politician said addressing her supporters here, adding, she will not contest the elections.

Sumalatha had won the 2019 general elections with the support of BJP defeating Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil.

JD(S) headed by former prime minister HD Deve Gowda joined NDA in September last year.

As part of the seat-sharing arrangement, BJP would now contest in 25 constituencies and JDS the remaining three, including Mandya, in the State.

She said though she was an independent MP, BJP government at the Centre gave grants to Mandya Lok Sabha constituency to the tune of Rs 4,000 crore, and praised BJP leaders for always taking her into confidence before taking any decision pertaining to the district.

Sumalatha said BJP leaders offered her to contest from elsewhere but she rejected it saying that she will stick to Mandya for being the 'daughter-in-law' of the district.

She said some of her supporters also wanted her to join Congress. "But a senior Congress leader said the party never felt the need of Sumalatha in the party -- neither earlier nor now or in future. How can a person with self-esteem ever wish to go to Congress after listening to these words," the MP said. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Sumalatha Ambareesh **PHOTO: ANI**

Vistara cancels 26 flights, meets pilots amid crisis

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

Amid flight cancellations due to non-availability of crew, Vistara's top officials on Wednesday held a meeting with pilots where discussions were held on new contracts and rostering issues, according to sources. The Tata Group airline cancelled around 26 flights on Wednesday, the sources in the know said. With a section of pilots reporting sick to protest against the revised pay structure, Vistara cancelled over 100 flights in the last two days and aviation regulator DGCA has asked the carrier to submit a daily report on the cancellations and delays. ***—PTI***

>>>More on Page 7

PHOTO: PTI

4 killed, 10 hurt in explosion at T'gana pharma plant

HYDERABAD, 3 APRIL

Four people were killed and over 10 others suffered injuries following an explosion in a reactor at a pharmaceutical company in Sangareddy district of Telangana on Wednesday, police said. The blast, which occurred around 5 pm, triggered a fire. "The reactor exploded at the pharma company and people around it were thrown away in its impact... So far four people have died...10-15 people sustained injuries. They have been shifted to a hospital and are undergoing treatment," a senior police official said. Relief operations were underway, the official added. ***—PTI***

2,500 houses, schools damaged in Mizoram storm

AIZAWL, 3 APRIL

More than 2,500 houses, schools and government buildings were damaged and a woman was killed in thunderstorm that hit Mizoram in the past three days, officials said on Wednesday. A powerful storm and hailstorm accompanied by heavy rain lashed several parts of Mizoram between Sunday and Tuesday, wreaking havoc in the state. Officials also said that a 45-year-old woman died when a tree fell upon her. ***—PTI***

TN drags Centre to SC over pending funds

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Tamil Nadu government has moved Supreme Court by filing a lawsuit alleging that its funds for natural disasters are withheld by the Centre.

MK Stalin-led DMK government has invoked Article 131 of the Constitution for filing an original suit against the Centre in the top court.

Supreme Court has exclusive and original jurisdiction over legal issues between states or between states and the union government or their instrumentalities.

The state government urged the top court to direct the Centre to provide over Rs 37,000 crore in aid for damages caused by recent floods and cyclone Michaung. Besides seeking financial assistance of Rs 19,692.69 crore for the damage caused bycyclone Michaung in December last year, the Tamil Nadu government has sought money to the tune of Rs 18,000 crore for losses incurred due to unprecedented rains in southern districts of the state. The plea also seeks a direction to the Centre to release Rs 2000 crore as interim measure.

Recently, Karnataka moved the top court alleging that the Centre was not giving financial assistance to it to meet the challenges faced over a drought situation. *—PTI*

PHOTO:

TODDLER FALLS INTO BOREWELL IN KARNATAKA

VIJAYAPURA, 3 APRIL

A two-year-old boy fell into a borewell in Lachayan village of Indi taluk in this district of Karnataka on Wednesday evening, police said.

Rescue operations are underway to rescue the boy who is estimated to have fallen, head first, into a depth of around 16 feet, they said. According to the police, the child fell into the borewell when he went out to play on his father Satish Mujgonda's 4-acre land. The matter came to light when someone heard the child cry and immediately informed the family. The boy is estimated to be stuck at a depth of around 16 feet and no voice can be heard as of now but some movement has been noticed. *—Salar News*

HC reserves verdict as ED says Kejri can't claim arrest immunity

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday told Delhi High Court that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, arrested in a money laundering case linked with the alleged excise scam, cannot claim "immunity" from arrest on the ground of upcoming elections as law is applied equally to him and an "aam aadmi".

AAP national Convener, currently in judicial custody, questioned the "timing" of his arrest by the agency and said it was in contravention of the basic structure of the Constitution, including democracy, free and fair elections and level playing field.

His senior counsel claimed the agency was "trying to play" a "fixed match" and the arrest was based on uncorroborated statements of co-accused turned approvers.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma reserved verdict on Kejriwal's petition challenging his arrest and subsequent remand to the ED in the case till 28 March after hearing both the sides at length.

The case pertains to the alleged corruption and money laundering in formulating and executing the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22 that was later scrapped.

Seeking the relief of Kerjiwal's release, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi contended there was no necessity to arrest the AAP politician in violation of the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act a year and a half after the probe was initiated by ED in August 2022.

"The timing of arrest reeks of basic structure issue," he said, adding the agency was suppressing exculpatory statements of witnesses while "turning the criminal law on its head" by adopting a "completely biased approach". He also said the "belated" statements of approvers Raghav Magunta and Sarath Reddy cannot be relied upon as the latter even donated to the ruling party through electoral bonds. *—PTI*

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO:**

AMBANI BREAKS INTO TOP 10, RANKED AT 9TH IN FORBES GLOBAL RICH LIST

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Oil-to-telecom conglomerate Reliance Industries Ltd head Mukesh Ambani continues to be the richest Indian and has now broken into the world's top 10 wealthiest persons in the latest Forbes 2024 Billionaire List.

Ambani, 66, is ranked 9th on the list with a wealth of USD 116 billion, up from USD 83.4 billion in the 2023 ranking, according to Forbes.

Gautam Adani is the second richest Indian and is ranked at No.17 on the global list. He is worth USD 84 billion, up from USD 47.2 billion in 2023 when his apples-to-airport conglomerate was rocked by a damning report by US short-seller Hindenburg Research. Adani group has denied all allegations in the report.

Forbes 2024 Billionaires List features 2,781 individuals, an increase of 141 names from last year's list. Two-thirds of the list's members are worth more than a year ago; only one-fourth are poorer.

Fashion and cosmetics giant LVMH's Bernard Arnault is at the top of the list with USD 233 billion wealth, followed by Elon Musk with USD 195 billion and Amazon's Jeff Bezos with USD 194 billion.

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg comes next in the list with a net worth of USD 177 billion.

India added 31 billionaires to the list compared to last year with the number now reaching 200. *—PTI*

INDIA'S REFORMS MAN

Manmohan ends 33-year-long Parl stint

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Soft spoken, erudite and modest, Manmohan Singh has exited public life with his retirement from the Rajya Sabha - the former prime minister and architect of India's economic reforms slipping out of politics as quietly and without ceremony perhaps as he entered it 33 years ago.

The man who famously spoke of studying under the dim light of kerosene lamps in his village without electricity and went on to become a storied academic is the copybook reluctant politician, almost stumbling into the rough and tumble of mainstream politics.

Singh, 91, hailed for putting India on the road to liberalisation in the early 1990s and also criticised for turning a blind eye to allegations of corruption during his 10-year tenure as prime minister, became a member of the Rajya Sabha for the first time in October 1991 and was re-elected for five more terms.

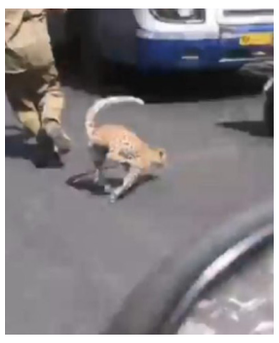
He was among the five Rajya Sabha members whose tenure ended on Wednesday.

Singh was finance minister in the Narasimha Rao-led Congress government and continued in his post till 1996. He went on to become prime minister from 2004 to 2014. Sonia Gandhi declined requests from Congress to become prime minister and named Singh instead, their partnership steering the country's ship for a decade till the BJP won in 2014.

The six-term Rajya Sabha MP, however, could never become a member of the lower house. Singh contested only one Lok Sabha election from the South Delhi constituency in 1999 and was defeated by BJP's Vijay Kumar Malhotra.

Singh was a Rajya Sabha member from Assam for five continuous terms, from 1 October, 1991, to 14 June, 2019, and thereafter, was again elected to the House from Rajasthan after the short gap. He has been a member from Rajasthan since 20 August, 2019, and his term ended on 3 April. Singh was the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha from 21 March, 1998, to 21 May, 2004. *—PTI*

Manmohan Singh **PHOTO: PTI**



A screengrab from a video
PHOTO: X

6-month-old leopard cub rescued

BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

A six-month-old leopard cub was rescued near Turahalli reserve forest here on Wednesday.

In a video capturing the incident, the animal can be seen crossing a road in the forest amidst traffic, causing panic among commuters. A man narrowly escaped an attack by the leopard, which was also caught on camera. The footage depicts the cub charging towards the man amid moving traffic. However, the man manages to evade the attack, prompting the leopard to land in front of a bus instead. The leopard cub has sustained injuries on its leg. The vehicle came and hit the leopard and it could not get up and run.

The Forest Department personnel rescued it and offered treatment. "It appeared like it was dehydrated. We rescued it safely and got it treated at People for Animals (Wildlife Hospital). After proper treatment and recuperation, we will release it into the forest," a senior forest official said. In November 2023, residents in Bengaluru were gripped with fear after a big cat was sighted multiple times in residential areas. Despite combing operations to trace and rescue the leopard, the animal was tragically shot dead during the operation. Similar incidents have occurred in the past, with leopards being spotted near Kengeri and in Turahalli forest.

—Salar News

POCSO case accused garlanded with shoes

BELAGAVI, 3 APRIL

An accused who was arrested in a Pocso case and released from jail after serving his term was garlanded with shoes and paraded shirtless in a village at Doddawada village in Belagavi district on Wednesday.

According to police, the accused had been jailed for three months after being arrested in connection with sexually harassing a girl from the village.

The accused was released from prison on bail and returned to the village. After spotting him in the village, the victim beat him with her slippers. Later, her family members tied the hands of the accused and garlanded him with shoes. He was paraded shirtless in the village and the accused was beaten up by the victim and villagers.

—Salar News

DROUGHT RELIEF

Will quit if there was delay in asking Centre for aid: CM

CM rejects Shah's claims that State delayed on proposal

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy CM DK Shivakumar during a roadshow in support of Congress candidate Sunil Bose ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Chamarajanagar on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

MYSURU, 3 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said he would quit the post if it's proved that there was a delay on the part of his government in submitting a proposal to the Centre seeking drought relief, dismissing the charge made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Addressing party workers and leaders in Bengaluru on Tuesday, Shah said there is drought in Karnataka, and the State government was late by three months in sending a proposal to the Central government and "Today the application for drought relief from the Centre is with the Election Commission". "They (Congress government) are doing politics over it now."

Siddaramaiah accused Shah of "lying" and wondered whether the Union Minister would also resign if it's proven so. "In September, we had given the first memorandum, in October the Central team (inter-ministerial central team) had come (to State), they too had given their report on 20 October (to Central government), if it is a lie, I will resign, will he (Shah) give (resignation)? Will Amit Shah resign? Ask him. Let him decide," the Chief Minister said.

He said, "In October itself, we have given three memorandums, after that the Central team came and inspected and gave a report. On 19 December, I met the Prime Minister and on 20 December met Amit Shah. I told him about the report and requested him to hold a meeting and give us relief."

It has been four months since December, he said, adding "Then how can he say we delayed giving a memorandum? We have given the memorandum five months ago, it's about six months now, still, he has not given any relief, what moral right he has? If the Home Minister of the country speaks blatant lies like this..."

Questioning as to why the State government has to lie, Siddaramaiah asked, "Is it not a fact that the state's Revenue Minister and I met him (Shah) with a request on 20 December? Is it not a fact that he told me that he has called a meeting on 23 December and it will be decided there? I'm ready to prove it."

He said all these documents have been submitted to the Supreme Court. "Amit Shah should not lie this much."

—PTI

State addressed farmers' concerns: CM

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 3 APRIL

Congress government in State has been addressing the concerns of drought-hit farmers despite Central government not supporting it, said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah while leading a roadshow in support of Congress candidate Sunil Bose in Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha constituency.

Highlighting key issues such as job creation, fuel price reduction and drought relief, Siddaramaiah accused the Modi-led government of reneging on its electoral assurances.

Addressing the gathering, Siddaramaiah reminisced about the late R Dhruva Narayan, the former MP from Chamarajanagar. Drawing parallels between Narayan's legacy and Bose's candidacy, Siddaramaiah urged voters to rally behind Bose and ensure his triumph in the electoral fray.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, Home Minister G Parameshwara and MLAs from seven out of eight Assembly constituencies were among those who participated in the roadshow. *—Salar News*

LOK SABHA POLLS

No 'Modi wave' in Karnataka, says Shivakumar

BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress President DK Shivakumar on Wednesday said his party is in a comfortable position in the State. "There is no Modi wave in Karnataka because Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not left any footprint in Karnataka during the last 10 years of his rule," Shivakumar said in an exclusive interview to PTI.

He claimed that BJP did nothing in the State during its four years rule and did not fulfil any of its promises. "

He said while crores of rupees had been collected as taxes from Karnataka by the Union government, the state did not get anything in return, even during the severe drought being faced in 230 out of 236 taluks.

On BJP fielding noted cardiologist Dr CN Manjunath against his brother and three-time MP DK Suresh in Bengaluru Rural constituency, Shivakumar claimed that Congress will win with a victory margin of over two lakh votes.

Regarding the BJP-JD(S) electoral tie-up in Karnataka, Shivakumar said it is a failed alliance and the people will reject them.

"(HD) Kumaraswamy (JD(S) leader and NDA's Mandya candidate) and all the JDS candidates will lose," he claimed.

On Union Home Minister Amit Shah reportedly levelling corruption charge against him, Shivakumar said it was a political allegation against him.

"There is nothing against me, they can't prove anything. These are baseless allegations against me," Shivakumar added.

Shivakumar denied any dissent in the party over ticket distribution for the Lok Sabha polls stating that the entire Congress party is united.

"There is no dissent and within 24 hours we will sort it out. But in BJP, the party is burning from within. The BJP workers are going to kill the BJP itself. The BJP has changed (candidates) in around 10 seats and they know that they are losing in the campaigns," he said.

—PTI

- While crores of rupees had been collected as taxes from Karnataka by Union government, the State did not get anything in return, even during the severe drought being faced in 230 out of 236 taluks, DK Shivakumar said

There is no Modi wave in Karnataka because Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not left any footprint in Karnataka during the last 10 years of his rule

-DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress President

Man tries to end his life on High Court premises

BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

A man allegedly attempted to die by suicide inside Karnataka High Court on Wednesday by slitting his throat with a knife in front of Chief Justice Nilay Vipinchandra Anjaria in Court Hall One, police said.

According to police, Srinivas, who is from Mysuru, handed over a file to the security staff at the entrance of Court Hall One, and before anyone could realise what was happening, he slit his throat in the presence of Chief Justice Anjaria.

The security personnel took him to Bowring Hospital, where he is now being treated, a police officer said. "We don't know why he took such an extreme step," he said. No note was found at the spot.

Chief Justice Anjaria expressed concern about the security lapse on the High Court premises and asked those in charge how the man could bring a sharp object inside.

He also ordered police to record findings and evidence from the spot.

The contents of the file that Srinivas gave the security staff are unknown, and the court said it would not check the documents since it was not presented to the court by a designated advocate.

High Court also said the authorities must not receive any document without the court's order.

Police are waiting to record his statement once he is declared fit by doctors. *—PTI*

'CM would have died if he didn't get Covid vaccine'

KOLAR, 3 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah would have died had he not been administered the anti-Covid vaccine, BJP MP from Kolar S Muniswamy said on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did well to provide vaccines free of cost to the entire population of the country, but Congress is trying to tarnish his image, Muniswamy said.

In Western countries, the anti-Covid vaccine was sold at a premium, but here in India it was given free of cost to every individual. While taking up development works including guarantee schemes, Congress towed a partisan attitude by taking their party workers on priority, the MP said. On the other hand, the Prime Minister did not distinguish between BJP and Congress leaders or party workers while allowing them to avail the vaccine.

He called upon the voters to assess the development the county has made in the last decade under the leadership of Modi and to support BJP. He urged the voters not to be carried away by gimmicks of Congress. *—Salar News*

Will support my 'mother' Sumalatha in LS polls: Darshan

Actor Darshan played a vital role in the victory of Sumalatha during the last Lok Sabha elections
PHOTO: X/@Anjan94150697

MANDYA, 3 APRIL

Renowned actor Darshan has extended his support to Mandya MP Sumalatha, who was denied a ticket to contest from the constituency, saying he stands firmly behind his "mother".

"Whatever decision my mother takes, I will stand behind her. Mother is mother. I will do whatever she say," Darshan said. Darshan underscored his unwavering loyalty, asserting that he would follow his mother's guidance without hesitation.

Darshan fondly recalled the unwavering support and warmth extended by Sumalatha's family, expressing gratitude to the farmers who had welcomed him with open arms during previous campaign endeavours. Despite facing personal challenges, including a scheduled operation on his hand, Darshan said: "If mother calls me, I will tell him that I will complete mom's work and come."

Darshan and actor Yash played a vital role in the victory of Sumalatha during last elections. *—Salar News*

Victor Dhanraj *PHOTO: SALAR*

VICTOR DHANRAJ DELIVERS HIS LAST POST AT 90

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

Bangalore General Post Office (GPO) mourned the passing of its oldest postman, Victor Dhanraj, who died at the age of 90.

Born on 15 October, 1934, in Coimbatore, Dhanraj moved to Bengaluru at the age of 13, initially finding employment as an office assistant and later as a construction worker at Vidhana Soudha. Inspired by the inscription "Government Work is God's Work," Dhanraj landed at Bengaluru GPO in 1957.

Those who knew Dhanraj best described him as a man of unwavering commitment and a pillar of the GPO community. Nagaraju V, a senior clerk at GPO, told Salar News "He always used to say 'Letters are not just paper and ink. They are the love that one person carries for the other person', that is why he never used to see the circumstances while carrying out his letter deliveries."

"He was as reliable as the sunrise," said Nandkishore Agarwal, a fellow postman. "Rain or shine, he'd be out there, delivering letters and parcels with a smile."

Department of Posts presented Dhanraj with the prestigious Meghdoot Award for being the Best Postman in 1988. He later retired in 1992.

Throughout his 35-year tenure as a postman, Dhanraj's dedication to his uniform set him apart. While many of his colleagues opted for a more casual approach, he meticulously maintained his attire, adding personal touches such as a bandana and polished boots. His commitment did not go unnoticed, as he became the face of the department, even featuring in a newspaper advertisement in 1972.

In a video tribute released by Karnataka Postal Service on Wednesday, Dhanraj was quoted saying, "I used to cycle the length and breadth of Bengaluru whether it was rain or sunshine and deliver letters, especially on Bandh days even when there was violence on the road."

—Salar News

PENULTIMATE DAY

Mansoor, Shobha & others file nominations for LS polls

BENGALURU, 3 APRIL

Several candidates including Bengaluru Central Congress candidate Mansoor Ali Khan and Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje filed their nominations on Wednesday for 26 April Lok Sabha elections.

Khan, along with his wife Tasbia Khan, has declared assets totalling nearly Rs 100 crore.

Khan, 51, possesses liquid assets worth Rs 24.45 crore, and immovable assets valued at Rs 62.19 crore, while his wife holds wealth worth 9.5 crore according to the affidavit filed during nominations.

Khan—politician, educationist, and community activist—confronts a formidable challenge in securing the Bengaluru Central Lok Sabha seat, currently held by BJP since 2009. Khan is a trustee of the KK Educational and Charitable Trust established by his father K Rahman Khan, a former Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

He led a rally from Prasanna Ganapati Devasthana, Sampangi Rama Nagara, to BBMP Head Office in Hudson Circle. Before filing his nomination, Khan, accompanied by his father K Rehman Khan, MLC Naseer Ahmed, and Shivajinagar MLA Rizwan Arshad, visited Hazrat Thawakkal Mastan Dargah at Cottonpet, Someshwara Temple at Ulsoor, and Infant Jesus Church at Viveka Nagar.

Congress Bengaluru Central candidate Mansoor Ali Khan interacts with an elderly woman at Halasuru Someshwara Temple with Shivajinagar MLA Rizwan Arshad in Bengaluru, on Wednesday before filing nomination papers; Mansoor prays at Hazrat Tawakkal Mastan Dargah at Cottonpet with his father and former deputy chairman of Rajya Sabha Rahman Khan; Mansoor meets Fr John Anthony at Infant Jesus Church in Vivek Nagar; Bengaluru North BJP candidate Shobha Karandlaje arrives with supporters to file nomination in Bengaluru *PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Khan expressed concerns about BJP's governance and criticized their attempts to change the Constitution. He has just one case registered against him in Secunderabad.

Karandlaje submitted her papers as BJP's candidate from Bengaluru North. She held a roadshow accompanied by former ministers Byrathi Basavaraj and Gopalaiah. Karandlaje has declared assets valued at about Rs 13.88 crore and has liabilities worth Rs 4.06 crore. She owns no agricultural land, and has only a two-wheeler, according to her affidavit.

Minister HC Mahadevappa's son Sunil Bose filed his nomination as Congress nominee from Chamarajanagar.

K Jayaprakash Hegde, who was until recently the Chairman of Karnataka State Commission for Backward Classes that submitted the much-awaited Socio-Economic and Education Survey report, popularly known as the "caste census" to the government, filed his nomination as Congress candidate in Udupi-Chikkamagaluru segment. Congress candidate from Dakshina Kannada R Padmaraj also filed his papers.

Scion of erstwhile Mysuru royal family Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar submitted another set of papers on Wednesday.

—Salar News with Agencies

Ex-MLA joins BJP, gets ₹140cr notice for 'illegal' mining

INDORE, 3 APRIL

The Indore district administration has issued notices to former MLA Sanjay Shukla, who has quit the Congress and joined the BJP, and three others proposing a fine of Rs 140.60 crore for alleged illegal mining of 'murum' (mixed) soil and stones, officials said on Wednesday. The mining department has unearthed illegal mining in two places of 5.50 hectares and 3.40 hectares in Baroli village adjoining Indore in Madhya Pradesh, they said. A fine of Rs 140.60 crore is proposed to be imposed on Shukla and three others under the Madhya Pradesh Minerals (Prevention of Illegal Mining, Transport and Storage) Rules 2022 for this illegal mining, the officials said. Besides Shukla, the other respondents in the notice are his brother Rajendra Shukla, president of the Eden Garden Housing Cooperative Society Limited, and Baroli village resident Meharban Singh Rajput, they said. *—PTI*

'Remove Bansuri Swaraj's name from Sanjay's bail order'

JAIPUR, 3 APRIL

Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered the deletion of advocate Bansuri Swaraj's name from its order of granting bail to AAP leader Sanjay Singh after the Enforcement Directorate said her name got added to the list due to an "inadvertent error". A bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna said, "Ok, we will correct the order." Advocate Zoheb Hussain, appearing for the ED, said Swaraj did not appear in the case nor did she represent the agency in the matter "Due to some inadvertent error her name is reflected in the appearance slip," Hussain said. Swaraj is a BJP candidate from the New Delhi Parliamentary constituency. On Tuesday, the top court granted Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh bail in a money laundering case related to the Delhi excise policy scam. *—PTI*

Ex-Bihar DyCM Sushil Modi reveals cancer diagnosis

PATNA, 3 APRIL

Former Bihar Deputy chief minister Sushil Kumar Modi on Wednesday revealed that he was diagnosed with cancer six months ago, and would not take part in the BJP's Lok Sabha poll campaign. Modi, 72, was named by BJP as one of its star campaigners for the state and a member of its election manifesto committee. "I have been battling cancer for the last six months. Now, I feel that the time has come to inform people about it. I will not be able to do anything for the Lok Sabha elections," he said on X. "I have told everything to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I will always remain grateful and dedicated to the country, Bihar and the party," he added. During his political career Modi was an MLA, an MLC, a member of Lok Sabha, and a Rajya Sabha MP. He was the deputy chief minister of the state from 2005 to 2013, and from 2017 to 2020. *—PTI*

Sena (UBT) leader's aide razes 'illegal' resort

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Anil Parab's associate Sadanand Kadam has started the demolition of the alleged unauthorised portion of a resort in Maharashtra's Ratnagiri following an assurance given to the Bombay High Court, officials said on Wednesday. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has been conducting a probe into an alleged money laundering case connected to the construction of the Sai Resort at Dapoli in coastal Ratnagiri district. Kadam, who had been arrested in the money laundering case and later granted bail, recently assured the Bombay High Court that he will demolish excess and unauthorised portion, allegedly constructed in violation of norms, at his own expenses. *—PTI*

BJP sues Atishi for 'join us or go to jail' claim

BJP wants AAP minister to apologise, says she has no proof

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

BJP's Delhi unit has sent a defamation notice to senior AAP leader Atishi and demanded a public apology for her claim that the saffron party approached her through a "very close" person to join it.

A day earlier, the Delhi minister claimed that four senior AAP leaders, including herself, would be arrested soon and claimed that she was advised to join the BJP or be ready to be arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a month.

At a press conference here on Wednesday, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said a defamation notice has been sent to Atishi, demanding a public apology for her claim. "Atishi failed to provide evidence of who approached her, how and when. AAP is undergoing a crisis in Delhi, which is why they are making such baseless allegations out of frustration. But we will not let her get away with this," he said.

Sachdeva chief asked Atishi to submit her phone to an investigation agency to prove her claim. Delhi BJP's lawyer said the party has sent a defamation notice to Atishi to withdraw her statement which he termed "false, defamatory, and concocted." Further legal action will be taken against her if she fails to back up her claims, he said."I want to tell BJP that we will not be scared of you. We are the soldiers of Kejriwal. We are aides of Bhagat Singh. We will continue to save the Constitution and will work to give the people a better life under the leadership of Kejriwal," she said. *—PTI*

Atishi cliamed that she was advised to join BJP or be ready to be arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in a month *PHOTO: PTI*

AAP leaders to go on fast against Arvind Kejriwal's arrest

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Aam Aadmi Party leaders will sit on a fasting dharna at Jantar Mantar on 7 April in protest against the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, party leader Gopal Rai said on Wednesday. Addressing a press conference, Rai, who is also a cabinet minister in Kejriwal government, gave a call for a nationwide fast against the arrest of the party national convener. "You can hold the collective fast anywhere -- at home, in your city, anywhere," he said. Rai said that the top leadership of the party was arrested with an "aim to finish AAP." *—PTI*

'KEJRIWAL LOST 4.5KG IN 13 DAYS SINCE ARREST'

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been rapidly losing weight since his arrest on 21 March, senior AAP leader Atishi claimed on Wednesday and accused BJP of putting his health at risk by keeping him in jail.

She said Aam Aadmi Party will seek legal help over the Chief Minister's health condition. However, the administration of Tihar jail, where Kejriwal is lodged till 15 April, said his weight has been constant since his judicial custody began.In a statement, Tihar jail authorities said, "Upon arrival on 1 April, Kejriwal was examined by two doctors and all vitals were normal. Also, his weight is constant at 65 Kg, since his arrival in jail and till date. Home-cooked food is being provided as per court order. His vital statistics are normal."

"Kejriwal ji is a severe diabetic. Despite health issues, he remained engaged 24 hours a day in the service of the country.Kejriwal's weight has decreased by 4.5 kg. BJP is putting his health at risk by putting him in jail," Atishi alleged in a post on X. *—PTI*

POLL BATTLE HEATS UP

Kerala LS polls: Rahul, Tharoor, Annie Raja, Sudhakaran file papers

T'PURAM, 3 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, party leader and local MP Shashi Tharoor, KPCC Chief K Sudhakaran, state Minister K Radhakrishnan and CPI's Annie Raja were among the high profile candidates who filed their nominations on Wednesday for the 26 April Lok Sabha polls, a day before the deadline.

Polling will be held in all of Kerala's 20 parliamentary constituencies on 26 April, in the second phase of the nationwide polls, for which the last date of filing nomination papers is on Thursday, according to an Election Commission notification.

Many of the candidates led road shows and foot marches on the way to filing their nominations at the district headquarters, to showcase their ground support and strength.

Gandhi held a massive roadshow and attacked BJP and RSS, accusing them of "trying to destroy" the Constitution and democratic nature of India, before he filed his nomination for Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency, seeking a second term from there.

Three-time Lok Sabha MP Tharoor is seeking a fourth consecutive term from Thiruvananthapuram, while Raja is contesting against Gandhi in Wayanad. Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Wednesday said the question of who could be an alternative to Prime Minister Narendra Modi is "irrelevant" as in a parliamentary system people are not electing an individual but a party or a coalition of parties.

Devaswom Minister K Radhakrishnan is trying his luck in the lower house of Parliament from Alathur in Palakkad, while it is a matter of pride for Sudhakaran that he retain his present seat, Kannur.

The nominations will be scrutinised on 5 April. *—PTI*

Rahul Gandhi *PHOTO: PTI*

Kharge launches Congress' 'Ghar Ghar Guarantee' initiative

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday launched the party's 'Ghar Ghar Guarantee' initiative here under which it aims to reach out to eight crore households across the country and make them aware of its "guarantees".

Kharge launched the initiative from Usmanpur, Kaithwada, in the North East Delhi Parliamentary Constituency and distributed pamphlets on the party's 'Paanch Nyay Pachees Guarantee'.

"We are distributing this guarantee card to take our 'Panch Nyay Pachees Guarantee' to people. We want to take this initiative to eight crore households across the country," Kharge said while launching the initiative.

Kharge hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying, "We give a guarantee that our government has always worked for people and will always do so. Modi talks about Modi ki Guarantee but his guarantee never reaches the people," he said. *—PTI*

SEBI SHOULD NOT BECOME ANOTHER SBI, SAYS CONGRESS

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Congress on Wednesday hoped that Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) tasked with probing charges of alleged stock manipulation by the Adani Group would not seek further extension for presenting its report to push the deadline past the election date.Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said the SEBI should not become another SBI, which is "too scared to touch the sacred". *—PTI*

CRACK IN INDIA BLOC WIDENS

Mehbooba Mufti's PDP to go solo in J&K

SRINAGAR, 3 APRIL

In another jolt to INDIA bloc, People's Democratic Party (PDP) Chief Mehbooba Mufti announced on Wednesday that they will pitch their candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The development came after National Conference (NC) leader Omar Abdullah said that they would be contesting elections for all three seats in Kashmir.

"In Mumbai, I said, Farooq Abdullah is our best representative and he will take the call. Omar Abdullah should have discussed the same with me for greater interest, we were not going to fight over parliamentary elections," Mufti told reporters in Srinagar.

"But the way Omar Abdullah said, PDP doesn't exist and is nowhere, hurt us. The BJP broke my party completely but Omar's statement made my workers disappointed. Now my workers are calling me and telling me that we should also pitch our candidates," Mufti said.

The former chief minister further confirmed that her party would now enter the contest on its own.

"All the agencies are after my workers, so I felt my workers were humiliated by Omar Abdullah's statement," she alleged. "We will pitch our candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections," Mufti told reporters.

Reacting to this, Omar Abdullah said, "...If she (PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti) has announced to field candidates for all 5 seats, it is her choice. We have fielded candidates for 3 seats in Kashmir based on her formula..."

NC and PDP are partners in INDIA bloc formed to challenge BJP. *—ANI*

Mehbooba Mufti *PHOTO: PTI*

FAROOQ ABDULLAH TO NOT CONTEST LOK SABHA POLLS

SRINAGAR, 3 APRIL

National Conference President and sitting MP from Srinagar Farooq Abdullah would not contest Lok Sabha polls owing to his heath, the party said on Wednesday.

The announcement was made by his son and NC Vice President Omar Abdullah at a party function in Rawalpora on the outskirts of the city here.He said it is now the party's responsibility to field the best candidate from the constituency. He hoped that the voters would help the NC candidate succeed so that he/she becomes a voice of the people of Srinagar in Delhi. In the 2002 Legislative Assembly elections, Omar was chosen to lead NC, while the 86-year-old Farooq shifted base to the Centre.Farooq was elected to Rajya Sabha in 2002 from Jammu and Kashmir and then re-elected in 2009. He resigned from Rajya Sabha in May 2009 and won a seat in the Lok Sabha from Srinagar.

He joined UPA government as an energy minister. He contested the Srinagar Lok Sabha seat in 2014 elections but was defeated by PDP candidate Tariq Hameed Karra. *—PTI*

NO MUSLIM WILL LOSE CITIZENSHIP OVER CAA: RAJNATH

GHAZIABAD, 3 APRIL

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday said no Muslim living in India will lose his or her citizenship. He accused the Opposition of creating confusion in the community about Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Addressing an election rally in support of the party's Lok Sabha candidate Atul Garg in Ghaziabad, he said BJP does not engage in politics based on caste, creed and religion but stands for nation-building.

I want to tell my Muslim brothers that rest assured we believe in the concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', i.e., the whole world is our family. No matter what caste or creed one is born in or a follower of any religion or sect, we consider everyone as a member of our family," Singh said.

He said BJP has delivered on what it promised in its manifestos since the days when the party was known as Jana Sangh, whether it was the issue of Ram temple in Ayodhya or abolishing triple talaq. *—PTI*

DIDI SERVES TEA

West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee prepares tea at a local stall, in Jalpaiguri on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

POLITICAL SWITCH

Boxer Vijender Singh joins BJP

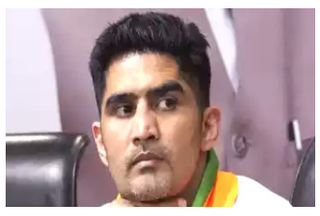
NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Olympic medal-winning boxer Vijender Singh on Wednesday justified his switch from the Congress to BJP, saying he made a "well thought out decision" after connecting with the saffron party through a common friend.

Singh had joined Congress ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha polls and was widely perceived to be close to Rahul Gandhi, who also attended his wedding in 2011.

"It's not like I have done something all of a sudden. I have been observing a few things for the past several days and I felt this is the right time to move to BJP." he said.

The Haryana boxer, 38, who now plies his trade in the professional circuit, has been a trailblazer inside the ring and has to his credit, Indian boxing's first Olympic medal -- a bronze in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Asked if the move was triggered by any dissatisfaction with the Congress party, Singh said, "That is a discussion for some other day. Yes, I will talk about those things too but not today. It's a fresh start I am making and I would want it to be on a positive note." *—PTI*



Vijender Singh *PHOTO: PTI*

IN KRISHNANAGAR

It's firebrand leader vs royal legacy

KRISHNANAGAR, 3 APRIL

The political contest in West Bengal's Krishnanagar has intensified as Lok Sabha constituency gears up for a closely fought election between two prominent candidates embodying divergent narratives of the burgeoning middle class and royal aristocracy.

At the forefront is Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra, former MP from the constituency, known for her impassioned speeches and vocal Opposition to the Narendra Modi government.

A fiery orator, Moitra has risen to national prominence during her time in Parliament for her compelling criticism of BJP-led NDA government, but her removal from the Lok Sabha due to allegations in the cash-for-query scandal has embroiled her in a controversy, though she believes her "victory will be the fitting response."

Challenging Moitra is BJP's Amrita Roy, the Rajmata of the Krishnanagar royal family, whose candidacy has injected a tinge of royalty into the electoral fray. Roy, married to the family of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy, is revered as the "Rani Maa" or Queen Mother by the constituency, carrying a legacy rich in tradition and aristocracy, despite the family's historical associations with the British in the Battle of Plassey in 1757.

Moitra, has often been labelled as an "elitist" by her Opposition. *—PTI*

Mahua Moitra and Amrita Roy *PHOTO: PTI*

'Mamata handled Sandeshkhali developments incredibly well'

KOLKATA, 3 APRIL

Trinamool Congress may have fielded actor-politician Saayoni Ghosh from Jadavpur Lok Sabha segment, a party stronghold on the southern fringes of Kolkata, but that hasn't granted her immunity to battling voters' perceptions on one of West Bengal's most pressing issues in the upcoming parliamentary polls -Sandeshkhali.Even as she made no attempts to hide her initial euphoria over her party's call to award her a ticket from the prestigious seat, she maintained that it "felt like a homecoming".Ghosh also asserted that the Sandeshkhali damage was "well controlled".."One Sandeshkhali won't turn around women's perception of Mamata Banerjee in this state," Saayoni said, "The very fact that she is the country's only woman Chief Minister itself goes to show how Bengal reposes faith in a woman to run a government." *—PTI*

Ch'garh: 3 more bodies of Naxalites found; toll hits 13

RAIPUR, 3 APRIL

Three more bodies of Naxalites were recovered on Wednesday in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur where a fierce encounter took place between security personnel and Naxalites the previous day, police said. With this, the number of Naxalites killed in the gun battle on Tuesday has risen to 13. Following the major anti-insurgency operation ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the police on Tuesday found bodies of 10 Naxalites, including a woman. During the search operation still underway in the area, the bodies of three more Naxalites were recovered on Wednesday morning from a dense forest where the encounter took place, a senior police official said. "The identity of the dead Naxalites was yet to be ascertained but prima facie, it appears that they belonged to the PLGA (People's Liberation Guerrilla Army) company no. 2 of Maoists," the official said. On Tuesday, the gunfight broke out between security forces and Naxalites at around 6 am near Lendra and Korcholi villages. *—PTI*

R'than magistrate booked for asking rape victim to strip

JAIPUR, 3 APRIL

Police have booked a magistrate in Karauli for allegedly asking a Dalit rape victim to strip to show her injuries, an officer on Wednesday said. Deputy SP (ST-SC) cell Mina Meena said that the victim had filed a complaint on March 30 alleging that the Hindaun court magistrate asked her to strip in order to see her injuries. "She refused to strip and after recording the statement in the court on 30 March, she registered a complaint against the magistrate. The case was registered with Kotwali Police Station under charges of outraging modesty," Meena said.According to police, the woman was allegedly raped on 19 March and an FIR in the matter was registered on 27 March at Hindaun Sadar Police Station. *—PTI*

J&K sub-inspector, gangster die after shootout

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

A police sub-inspector and a wanted criminal were killed and a special police officer was injured in a gunfight on the Government Medical College (GMC) hospital premises in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua, officials said on Wednesday. Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha and Director General of Police (DGP) R R Swain paid rich tributes to slain Sub-Inspector Deepak Sharma. The DGP pledged to go "hammer and tongs" against criminals, saying attempts are being made to set up a "Punjab-type" criminal syndicate in Jammu and Kashmir. Sharma, 32, who was posted at the Ramgarh (Samba) police station, suffered head injuries during the encounter that broke out on Tuesday evening outside the main hospital building in Kathua and subsequently, succumbed to his injuries at a private hospital in Pathankot, the officials said. *—PTI*

Chargesheet filed against CEO for son's murder

PANAJI, 3 APRIL

The Goa Police have filed a chargesheet in a court here against Suchana Seth, the CEO of an AI start-up, accused of killing her four-year-old son at an apartment in the coastal state, a senior official said. Seth, 39, was arrested from Chitradurga in neighbouring Karnataka on January 7 while she was travelling in a taxi with her son's body stuffed in a bag. She left Goa on 6 January after allegedly killing her child at an apartment in Candolim area of the state. The Calangute police earlier this week filed a 642-page chargesheet against Seth in the Goa Children's Court, the official said on Tuesday. The chargesheet mentioned that the child died as a result of shock and respiratory asphyxia caused by strangulation. *—ANI*

No rise in medicine prices, says Centre

Govt says reports of price hikes are fake and misleading

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Earlier some media reports had claimed that prices of more than 500 medicines would be increased from April *PHOTO: ANI*

Government has debunked media reports that medicine prices will witness a significant hike by up to 12 per cent from April 2024.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare clarified that these reports of price hikes are fake and misleading.

Earlier some media reports had claimed that from April prices of more than 500 medicines would be increased.

Ministry of Health, termed these reports as fake, misleading and malicious. A statement from the Ministry said that "National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) under the Department of Pharmaceuticals annually revises the ceiling prices of scheduled medicines based on Wholesale Price Index (WPI) and this increase is nominal".

The statement further clarified that during the calendar year 2023, the annual change in WPI (Wholesale Price Index) was nominal (+) 0.00551 percent so the authority in its meeting held on 20th March has approved the nominal increase of 0.00551 percent in the prices for the scheduled medicines.

This negligible WPI increase translates into minimal changes in medicine prices. Specifically, out of 923 medicines under price regulation, 782 will witness no alteration in ceiling prices, maintaining the status quo until 31 March, 2025. Moreover, for 54 medicines with ceiling prices ranging from Rs 90 to Rs 261, the increase amounts to a mere Rs. 0.01 says the statement.

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority also ensures that the manufacturers increase the prices of medicines in line with the ceiling price established by the authority. While the manufacturers have the liberty to avail or forgo the minuscule price adjustment set by the authority.

The statement by the Ministry clarified that the NPPA's measures to regulate medicine prices ensure that citizens can continue to access essential medications without experiencing any significant financial burden. The Government also urges the public to rely on credible sources for accurate information regarding medicine. *—ANI*

Locals gather at the site after a fire broke out at a tailoring shop, in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar in Maharashtra on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

7 die of suffocation after fire at tailoring shop in M'rashtra

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 3 APRIL

Seven people, including two children, died of suffocation after a fire broke out in a tailoring shop in Maharashtra's Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar city early Wednesday morning, a senior police official said.

The blaze erupted at around 4 am in the shop located at Dana Bazar in Cantonment area.

The tailoring shop and other commercial establishments were located on the ground floor of a building while people were residing on the upper floor, the official said.

"The shop suddenly caught fire at around 4 am. The police came to know about the incident at 4.15 am. Following the fire, smoke entered the first floor where a family was residing above the shop," Police Commissioner Manoj Lohiya told reporters. The deceased included three women, two men and two children, he said.

The exact cause of the fire would be known after an inquiry, he added.

The deceased are Asim Shaikh, 3, Pari Shaikh, 2, Wasim Shaikh, 30, Tanveer Shaikh, 23, Hamida Begum, 50, Shaikh Sohail, 35, and Reshma Shaikh, 22, another official said. *—PTI*

Nuh violence accused Bittu Bajrangi beats man, cops watch

FARIDABAD, 3 APRIL

Bittu Bajrangi *PHOTO: PTI*

Cow vigilante Bittu Bajrangi, who was also accused in Nuh violence, was caught on camera thrashing a man with a stick while a policeman watched, police said on Wednesday.

They said Bajrangi has been booked and they are considering suspending the policeman.

In his complaint, the victim Shyamu said that he was thrashed because Rajkumar Panchal, also known as Bittu Bajrangi, thought he was a Muslim.

Shyamu said he was he taking a girl to buy chocolates when he was picked up by some men and taken to Bajrangi's house.

A video of the incident surfaced on the internet showing Bittu Bajrangi, a cow vigilante, along with some other men thrashing Shyamu, a tenant residing in Sanjay Enclave of Faridabad.

According to the complaint filed by Shyamu at the Saran Police Station, the incident occurred on Monday when he was on his way to a shop with a girl to buy chocolates.

He said some men caught him and took him to Bajrangi's house where they pinned him down, thrashed him with sticks and threatened to kill him.

"That girl is like my daughter but due to some misunderstanding, they took me to Bittu Bajrangi, who without any reason assaulted me assuming that I am a Muslim," he said.

"An FIR has been registered and a recommendation for the suspension of the policeman has also been sent to senior officials. We are investigating the matter and the accused will be arrested soon," said the Station House Officer Sangram Dahiya. Bajrangi, who was arrested in a case of violence in Haryana's Nuh last year, has been out on bail. *—PTI*

MHA REVOKES FCRA LICENCES OF 5 NOTABLE NGOs

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Union Home Ministry has cancelled the registration of at least five NGOs for alleged violation of various provisions of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, sources said on Tuesday. NGOs whose registrations have been cancelled are CNI Synodical Board of Social Service, Voluntary Health Association of India, Indo-Global Social Service Society, Church's Auxiliary for Social Action, and Evangelical Fellowship of India, they said. With the cancellation of their Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) registration, these NGOs will no longer be able to receive foreign contributions nor utilise the existing available funds. *—PTI*

Rajiv Gandhi convicts deported to Sri Lanka

CHENNAI, 3 APRIL

Rajiv Gandhi assassination case convicts Murugan, Robert and Jayakumar were deported to Sri Lanka from Chennai airport Wednesday after they got their passport and received green signal from Sri Lankan government. Murugan, Jayakumar and Robert were staying at the Trichy refugee camp and were taken to the Chennai airport by the Trichy police.

Murugan's wife, Nalini, who was also a convict in the case, came to send off Murugan at the Chennai airport.

Earlier in March, Nalini filed a petition in Madras High Court seeking an order from the Central and state governments to permit her husband Murugan for an interview to obtain a passport to travel to the United Kingdom and settle with his daughter there.

In the petition filed in this regard, Nalini has mentioned that while Supreme Court has released all the seven people, her husband Murugan has been kept in a special camp in Trichy district as he is a citizen of Sri Lanka.

Nalini and Murugan were released from jail following the Supreme Court order on 12 November, 2022.

In her petition Nalin had said she wants to live with her daughter who lives in London, she mentioned that both of them (Murugan and Nalini) have applied for passports that can permit to travel all countries and were called for an interview on 30 January, 2024. *—ANI*

Andhra police arrests 5 over minor girl's suicide

VISAKHAPATNAM, 3 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh police have arrested five people here in suicide of a minor girl student who made sexual harassment allegations against her college officials, an official has said.

The 17-year-old girl died after she jumped from a building in the intervening night of March 28 and 29, alleging that some unidentified persons had threatened to post her objectionable pictures on social media.

Police arrested five people from Kommadi Chaitanya Polytechnic College in the port city. Those arrested were: N Shankar Rao, chemistry lab technician; Shankar Varma, head of college management; G Bhanu Praveen, principal; V Usha Rani, hostel warden; and her husband V Pradeep Kumar, police said on Tuesday. Visakhapatnam North assistant commissioner of police (ACP) B Sunil told PTI that the initial investigation pointed to Rao as the person who allegedly sexually harassed the deceased student.

"Rao is not admitting but in our investigation all the girls have pointed the finger at him. The girl's close friends have also said that," said Sunil. —PTI

IN KERALA

YouTuber arrested for fake news on EVMs

T'PURAM, 3 APRIL

K The owner of a YouTube channel has been arrested in Kerala for propagating fake news about the Electronic Voting Machines ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, police said today. The Alappuzha South police registered a case against the owner of the YouTube channel Venice TV Entertainment for allegedly propagating that EVMs involved fraud, reported news agency Press Trust of India. He was arrested for allegedly unleashing a campaign urging people to conduct voting for the general election through ballot paper. It was done with the intention of creating a rift and tension in society, police said.

The police said social media patrolling has been intensified in Kerala to monitor online content. The police also shared the numbers of various officials who are in-change of cyber patrolling and urged social media surveillance teams to inform them if any objectionable content come to their notice. *—ANI*

Travelling Ticket Examiner K Vinod who was murdered, accused Rajanikanta being taken into custody *PHOTO: METRO VAARTHA*

Migrant worker murders Kerala TTE in train, held

THRISSUR, 3 APRIL

RA migrant worker from Odisha accused of killing a Travelling Ticket Examiner by allegedly pushing him out of a moving train here has been arrested, police said on Wednesday.

The accused, Rajanikanta, a native of Ganjam in Odisha, was taken into custody from the nearby Palakkad district soon after the incident last evening and his arrest was recorded today, they said. He was travelling without a ticket on the train, police said.

The incident occurred on a Patna-bound train that originated from Ernakulam.

The victim K Vinod, 48, a TTE from Ernakulam, died after he was allegedly pushed out from the moving train.

It is suspected that another train traveling in the opposite direction ran over his body after he was allegedly pushed out by the accused near Velappaya area under the Thrissur Medical College police station limits.

According to the FIR registered today morning, the accused deliberately pushed the on-duty TTE with the intention of killing him.

As Rajanikanta was found traveling without a ticket, the TTE asked him to pay a penalty, which enraged him. *—PTI*

UP police exam paper leak mastermind arrested

NOIDA, 3 APRIL

A man accused in the National Health Mission (NHM) staff recruitment exam scam in Madhya Pradesh has been arrested from Greater Noida for alleged involvement in the Uttar Pradesh police constable recruitment exam paper leak, police said on Wednesday.

Rajiv Nayan Mishra was held by the Noida unit of the Special Task Force (STF) of UP police, they said.

"On the basis of an informer's tip-off, the main accused was arrested from Pari Chowk on Tuesday evening," a senior officer of the UP STF said.

"Mishra hails from Prayagraj but was currently settled in Bhopal.

During investigation it came to light that apart from Gurguram, Mishra had also got the paper read with his gang at a resort in Rewa, the premier probe agency said.

In the past, he has been jailed

PHOTO: PTI

in Gwalior in the NHM (National Health Mission) scam and in Kaushambi in the UP TET paper leak case, the STF added.

The state government had on December 23 last year notified the recruitment of 60,244 police constables.

The exam was held in February 2024, but after reports of widespread frauds in the UP Police constable recruitment examination, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced its cancellation and ordered a retest within six months. *—PTI*

SC to hear NGO's plea against VVPAT next week

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Supreme Court on Wednesday said it would hear next week a plea by an NGO seeking cross-verification of the votes cast in EVMs with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT).

A bench headed by Justices Sanjiv Khanna said the plea will be listed next Tuesday or Wednesday after advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the NGO, said the matter should be heard urgently. Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, also appearing in the matter, submitted that the elections are nearing and if the case is not heard, the plea would become infructuous. On 17 July, last year, the top court has sought the response of Election Commission of India on a plea filed by NGO 'Association for Democratic Reforms' (ADR). In the petition, the NGO has sought direction to the poll panel and the Centre to ensure the voters are able to verify through VVPATs that their vote has been "counted as recorded". *—PTI*

BOOST CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

1st batch of Indian workers reach Israel

TEL AVIV, 3 APRIL

Earlier, at least 900 construction workers from India reached Israel during the last few months *PHOTO: PTI*

The first batch of more than 60 workers from India have arrived in Israel under a government-to-government agreement to bolster the country's construction industry facing a huge shortage of trained hands.

The G2G mechanism has been worked out to keep away middlemen and to make the process of hiring fair through the screening tests conducted by Israeli examiners, who visited India a few times and coordinated the process with the Indian government agencies.

The first batch of Indian construction workers reached the country on Tuesday evening and will be followed by a series of arrivals in the coming weeks totalling close to 850 by mid-April.

Earlier, a little over 900 construction workers had arrived from India during the last few months through the B2B route, involving manpower agencies in both countries.

Construction industry sources expressed dismay at the slow pace saying that after three months during which over 20,000 foreign workers from India and Sri Lanka were approved for jobs in the construction sector through screening tests conducted by the Israeli Contractors Association (ICA), only about a 1,000 workers had arrived so far.

They blamed the "bureaucratic procedures" that included obtaining various permits from the governments for the long delay. Most of the selected workers are said to have resigned from their jobs and are said to be waiting to receive a visa to work in Israel, they said. *—PTI*

ISTANBUL FIRE

Firefighters work in the aftermath of a fire in a nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey. A fire at an Istanbul nightclub during renovations on Tuesday killed at least 29 people, officials and reports said. Several people, including managers of the club, were detained for questioning
PHOTO: PTI

Why are South Asians taking part in war?

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Men predominantly from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka have gone to fight the war as mercenaries ***PHOTO: PTI***

Young men from South Asia joined the Russian army in its war against Ukraine after they were promised lucrative salaries and benefits.

Now, they are being deprived of their salaries and are being killed on the front lines – all escape routes are rife with hurdles.

Men predominantly from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka have gone to fight the war as mercenaries.

In March 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin backed the plan to allow foreign volunteers to join Russia in its war against Ukraine. Observers speculated that Russia was looking to recruit fighters from Syria. A Nepali mercenary said that Nepali, Tajik and Afghan fighters are sent straight to the front line.

While the Nepali government does not have an exact number of Nepalis fighting in Russia, a foreign ministry official estimated that as many as 200 Nepalis were fighting in Russia by the end of 2023.

Some analysts estimated that about a thousand Nepali fighters have been deployed. The numbers are largely based on the complaints received by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Nepal from families of recruits, explained Santosh Sharma Poudel, a foreign policy analyst and co-founder of Nepal Institute for Policy Research.

The unofficial number of Indians fighting in Ukraine is estimated to be about 100, local media has reported.

Several men who went to fight the war said the reason behind it was their financial circumstances. The Sri Lankan men are not joining the war because they believe in the Russian cause, but because it is an opportunity to make money amid economic turmoil, said Gamini Viyangoda, a Sri Lankan writer, political analyst and columnist.

Hemil Mangukiya, 23, from India's Surat, found a job as a helper in the Russian army through a YouTube video posted by Dubai-based Faisal Khan. The travel agencies also exacted hefty fees from the men interested in going to Russia.A Nepali man recruited in October 2023 was charged USD 9,000 and in exchange was promised a monthly salary of about USD 3,000, along with benefits including Russian citizenship for himself and his family.

Sri Lankans were also promised monthly salaries up to USD 3,000 and the prospect of Russian citizenship.

Nine-year Sri Lankan military veteran, Nipuna Silva* who was already in debt, borrowed USD 4,000 to pay an agency that got him a job in Russia. He later joined the Russian army.

Mangukiya from Surat paid USD 3,600 to his recruiting agents and was offered USD 1,800 for a job as an assistant.

While many Nepalis headed to Russia directly from capital city Kathmandu, some were working as migrant workers in the Middle East.While the recruits were promised an intensive, three-month training programme, they say they received less than a month of combat drills in the Rostov region in southwestern Russia bordering Ukraine.While Mangukiya's parents had been assured that their son would be safe from any fighting, he was placed on the front lines.

Silva from Sri Lanka signed a one-year contract in January and on February 19, his wife received a USD 1,640 payment from Russia. Days later, she found out that Silva had died in a drone attack.At least five Sri Lankan recruits have died in the war. At least 12 Nepalis have been killed, and five others captured by Ukraine. At least two Indians have been killed on Ukrainian front lines. Nepali police have already arrested people accused of smuggling men to Russia, based on tip-offs.

The Foreign Ministry in Nepal has maintained contact with the Russian government as it attempts to repatriate recruits from Nepal, as well as retrieve dead bodies. Additionally, the ministry has urged Russia to provide financial compensation to the families of the deceased.

Indian Ministry of External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, said that on 8 March, the Central Bureau of Investigation "busted a major human trafficking network conducting searches in several cities and collecting incriminating materials. A case of human trafficking has been registered against several agents."New Delhi-based international lawyer and researcher, Aakash Chandran said that the Indian government should repatriate the Indian citizens who joined the Russian army voluntarily, alongside those who were forced into the army.The government is obliged to investigate and prosecute those citizens for any commission of international crime, including war crimes committed in Ukraine during their participation in armed conflict on behalf of Russia, "a country with which India is at peace".

**Some names have been changed to protect the identities of individuals worried about their safety*

—Al Jazeera

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

TB mortality rate in SE Asia rose 8.6% in 2021

The tuberculosis mortality rate in the Southeast Asia region saw a rise of 8.6 per cent in 2021 as compared to 2015, according to an official release from the World Health Organisation (WHO).

According to the release, the regional director of WHO, South-East Asia Region, Saima Wazed said, "TB mortality rate in the Region increased by 8.6 per cent in 2021 compared to 2015. The probability of death between the ages of 30 and 70 years from four major diseases - cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases - is still unacceptably high at 21.6 per cent."

She added that the poorest and groups with vulnerabilities face the greatest barriers in accessing needed healthcare, often with catastrophic consequences for their health and well-being.

"Poor quality care accounts for more diseases and deaths than lack of access to care," she said.

The Regional Director stated further that gender inequality affects equitable access to diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable health conditions.

The WHO will focus the spotlight on the theme 'My Health, My Right' on World Health Day this year on 7 April.

According to an official press release from WHO, South East Asia, "In a world witnessing multiple crises, from diseases to disasters to conflicts and climate change, realising people's right to health is now more important than ever. To mark the foundation of the World Health Organisation, the spotlight this year is on 'My Health, My Right', on World Health Day, celebrated on 7 April."Wazed also expanded on the significance of acknowledging the 'Right to Health' for all.

"Realising the right to health for all means creating conditions where everyone, everywhere can access high-quality health facilities, services and goods that prioritize people's needs, understanding and dignity," Wazed said.

"It also means a full set of rights that enable people to live healthily, such as education, safe water and food, nutritious food, adequate housing, good working and environmental conditions and information--or the underlying determinants of health," she added.

"To fulfil the right to health, both health services and the underlying determinants should be available, accessible, acceptable and of adequate quality," she said.The right to the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health--or, the right to health has been core to the WHO's mission, globally and in the region. It is enshrined in WHO's Constitution.

As WHO marks its seventy-sixth year on 7 April, the Southeast Asia Region has seen many gains and has much to celebrate about the right to health.

"The Region achieved a 68.5 per cent reduction in the maternal mortality ratio between 2000 and 2020. Under-five mortality rate declined significantly from 84 per 1000 live births in 2000 to 29 per 1000 live births in 2021 and the neonatal mortality rate from 41 per 1000 live births in 2000 to 17 per 1000 live births in 2021. Between 2015 and 2021 new HIV infections declined by 25 per cent and malaria incidence by 62 per cent," she added.However, despite progress, we still have a considerable way to go to make the right to health a reality for all in the WHO South-East Asia Region, the Regional Director said.

She added that despite global commitments to the right to health, nearly 40 per cent of the Region's people lack coverage of essential health services.

Investment in health by national governments, which is the foundation of advancing the right to health, is unacceptably low, which has resulted in high out-of-pocket expenditures, according to the release.

The proportion of households experiencing financial hardship in accessing basic health care has been rising."Violence against women and girls--a violation of their human rights and a priority public health issue--remains pervasive. More than one in every three women in the Region has experienced intimate partner violence at least once in their lifetime, with rural and uneducated women and those from the poorest households facing a significantly higher risk," she said.

"Too many still face stigma related to certain health conditions, such as TB, HIV/AIDS, disability or mental ill health. They also face discrimination in the health system based on their gender, class, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or other characteristics," the Regional Director said.

Wazed stated that equality and non-discrimination are core to a human rights-based approach to health.

All governments and other duty-bearers must respect, protect and fulfil the right to health and other human rights and to ensure their progressive realisation, the WHO release went further, adding, "Governments need to increase investments in health--especially to advance universal health coverage grounded in a primary health care approach.

"WHO is committed to advancing the right to health and other human rights. Let's make the right to health a reality for all," she added. *—ANI*

WHO will focus the spotlight on the theme 'My Health, My Right' on World Health Day this year on 7 April ***PHOTO: PTI***

Long COVID still has no cure — so these patients are turning to research

When Lisa McCorkell got COVID-19 in March 2020, her symptoms were mild. Her physicians told her to isolate from others and that she would recover in a few weeks. But the weeks stretched into months and McCorkell, who was working on a master's degree in public policy at the University of California, Berkeley, started having debilitating and bewildering symptoms: fatigue, dizziness and shortness of breath. Previously an avid runner, McCorkell found her heart racing from simple efforts.

She struggled to find an explanation, and soon realized that her physicians didn't know any more about her condition than she did. To complicate matters, the limited availability of high-quality testing for the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 in the early days of the pandemic left many of her doctors wondering whether her symptoms were really due to COVID-19 at all. "I didn't have health-care providers that took me seriously," McCorkell says. "That largely pushed me out of the health-care system."

McCorkell turned instead to those who were experiencing the same puzzling symptoms and frustrations, joining a support group for people with what would eventually be called long COVID. As they compared notes, McCorkell and a handful of others — many of whom had research experience — realized that the information they were sharing might be helpful not only for those with long COVID, but also for those looking to study the condition. So, they founded a non-profit organization, called the Patient-Led Research Collaborative (PLRC), to design, provide advice on and even fund basic and clinical research into long COVID and other chronic illnesses.

A survey run by the group and published in 2021 catalogued the more than 200 symptoms experienced by people with the condition (HE Davis et al. eClinicalMedicine 38, 101019; 2021). It is seen by some as putting long COVID on the map. "They really jump-started the interest," says Lucinda Bateman, a physician in Salt Lake City, Utah, who specializes in treating people who have long COVID and related conditions. "That was really a point from where more broad awareness arose."

In the past few years, this study and similar patient-led efforts have helped to shape research programmes on long COVID and kick off some early clinical trials of therapies that might otherwise have gone unexplored. Many patient advocates see the efforts as crucial. They also think the results are more helpful for advancing the understanding of long COVID than the current findings from programmes funded by the US$1.15-billion RECOVER initiative led by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). People with long COVID and their advocates have criticized the initiative for not always listening to the needs of people with long COVID.

Many patient advocates say that there is insufficient clinical research on the kinds of drug that people are already using ***PHOTO: PTI***

Getting involved in research is challenging, given the symptoms of long COVID, but many patient advocates say they have no choice. "They've got you over a barrel," says Margaret O'Hara, who coordinates patient involvement in research for a National Health Service hospital trust in England. O'Hara is on medical leave owing to long COVID. Referring to the research, she says: "You have to do it, because you are the one who is going to suffer for it if you don't, but at the same time, you're in bed sick. PLRC's survey of long COVID symptoms was the first major research study of the condition. The premise was simple enough: authors surveyed almost 3,800 people in 56 countries, many of whom were members of various long COVID support groups worldwide, including the network Body Politic, from which the PLRC originated. When the authors analysed the data, they found scores of symptoms in at least ten organ systems.

The study showed that the most prevalent problems were fatigue, post-exertional malaise — a worsening of symptoms after exertion — and the cognitive dysfunction that came to be referred to as brain fog. Nearly 86 per cent of participants reported relapses triggered by exertion; 87 per cent said fatigue was a main symptom; and 88 per cent reported brain fog, with no differences in cognitive issues across age groups.

In early 2020, Martha Eckey, a pharmacist in Minneapolis, Minnesota, developed a COVID-like illness. She experienced a crushing fatigue that no amount of sleep could relieve, and was bedbound for days at a time. The physicians she went to for help had no answers. In desperation, Eckey turned to the online community of people with long COVID.

Eckey designed a survey called TREAT ME, which asked people with long COVID and those with myalgic encephalomyelitis, also known as chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS), about their experiences, including whether they had tried any of a list of 150 medications and supplements. More than 4,000 people responded.

TREAT ME attracted the attention of scientists and research foundations, who soon realized that this information could help to shape their efforts. One was the Open Medicine Foundation, a non-profit organization in Agoura Hills, California, that studies infection-associated chronic illnesses such as long COVID and ME/CFS.

Many patient advocates say that there is insufficient clinical research on the kinds of drug that people are already using. In February, the RECOVER initiative received a further USD 515 million over the next 4 years to test more interventions and investigate the long-term effects of a SARS-CoV-2 infection. But so far, the only trials it has begun are of the antiviral medication Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir and ritonavir), which started enrolling patients in July 2023. RECOVER had come under fire for its plan to test the effectiveness of a computer game for relieving brain fog, which critics say won't meaningfully reduce symptoms, and for its decision to plan an exercise trial, given that many people with long COVID experience post-exertional malaise.

Courtesy, Nature

PHOTO: ANI

N Korea confirms it test fired new hypersonic missile

PYONGYANG, 3 APRIL

North Korea leader Kim Jong Un attended and oversaw the test launch of a brand new intermediate-range sold fuel missile that carried a hypersonic warhead on Tuesday, the country's official state media was cited as saying by Kyodo News According to Korean Central News Agency Kim Jong Un, attended the test launch of the solid fuel-powered Hwasong-16 missile in a Pyongyang suburb and claimed all missiles his country has developed are now based on solid fuel technology and are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. North Korea launched a ballistic missile toward the Sea of Japan on Tuesday, with the projectile falling into waters outside Japan's exclusive economic zone, according to the Japanese Defence Ministry. *—ANI*

Storms kill 7 people in eastern China

BEIJING, 3 APRIL

Violent rain and hailstorms have killed seven people in eastern China's Jiangxi province this week, including three people who fell from their apartments in a high-rise building. Dozens of homes were severely damaged by the storms, which started Sunday, and more than 800 people have been resettled, state broadcaster CCTV said Wednesday, citing a Jiangxi government emergency agency. Four people died on Sunday in Nanchang, the provincial capital. It wasn't clear from the report when or where the other three died, but another violent storm on Tuesday left people trapped in a collapsed house in the same city. Eleven people were hospitalised, according to an earlier CCTV report. *—AP*

Pakistan ruling coalition sweeps Senate elections

ISLAMABAD, 3 APRIL

The ruling coalition on Tuesday swept the Senate elections for 19 seats while the polling was postponed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over a dispute in the swearing-in of Opposition members elected to reserved seats, Dawn reported. Of the 19 seats for which polling was held on Tuesday, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) bagged 6 seats, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) won 11 while the Muttahida Quami Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) won a lone seat, Dawn reported citing unofficial figures. PML-N's numbers in the 96-member House have now risen to 19 while the PPP's are now up to 24. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf has 20 members in the Senate. In a post on X, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif congratulated the successful senators.*—ANI*

Over 3.5 lakh visited 1st stone temple in UAE

ABU DHABI, 3 APRIL

Over 3.5 lakh devotees visited the first stone Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi within a month of its opening for the public, according to temple authorities. The iconic temple which was inaugurated in February by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was opened for visitors on 1 March. "In the first month, there were approximately 350,000 devotees and visitors, 50,000 of whom visited each weekend (Saturday--Sunday). It's important to note that on Mondays the Mandir conducts private prayers and is closed to visitors, meaning the complex was accessible for only 27 out of the 31 days in March," a temple spokesperson said. "Every evening from Tuesday to Sunday, Ganga aarti is performed at 7.30 pm on the banks of the Swaminarayan ghat, which has been created using holy water from Ganga and Yamuna transported from India," he added. *—PTI*

Aid group halts food delivery in Gaza

The deaths of kitchen workers threatened to set back aid efforts by US and other countries

DEIR AL-BALAH, 3 APRIL

Some of Israel's closest allies, including the United States, on Tuesday condemned the deaths of seven aid workers who were killed by airstrikes in Gaza — a loss that prompted multiple charities to suspend food deliveries to Palestinians on the brink of starvation.

The deaths of the World Central Kitchen workers threatened to set back efforts by the US and other countries to open a maritime corridor for aid from Cyprus to help ease the desperate conditions in northern Gaza.

US President Joe Biden issued an unusually blunt criticism of Israel by its closest ally, suggesting that the incident demonstrated that Israel was not doing enough to protect civilians.

"Israel has not done enough to protect aid workers trying to deliver desperately needed help to civilians," he said, adding he was "outraged and heartbroken" by their killings. "Incidents like yesterdays simply should not happen," he added. "The United States has repeatedly urged Israel to conflict their military operations against Hamas with humanitarian operations, in order to avoid civilian casualties."

Ships still laden with some 240 tonnes of aid from the charitable group turned back from Gaza just a day after arriving, according to Cyprus. Other humanitarian aid organisations also suspended operations in Gaza, saying it was too dangerous to offer help. Israel has allowed only a trickle of food and supplies into Gaza's devastated north, where experts say famine is imminent.

The dead from Monday night's strikes included three British citizens, Polish and Australia nationals, a Canadian-American dual national and a Palestinian. Those countries have been key backers of Israel's nearly 6-month-old offensive in Gaza, and several of them denounced the killings.

The hit on the charity's convoy also highlighted what critics have called Israel's indiscriminate bombing and lack of regard for civilian casualties in Gaza.

Israel's military chief, Lt Gen Herzi Halevi, announced the results of a preliminary investigation early Wednesday. *—AP*

Ships still laden with some 240 tonnes of aid from the charitable group

PHOTO: PTI

Israel apologises for deaths of aid workers but strikes continue

TEL AVIV, 3 APRIL

As airstrikes on Hamas targets in Khan Yunis continued, the Israel Defense Forces on Wednesday apologised for an attack on an aid convoy, saying the strike resulted from a "misidentification." Seven workers from the World Central Kitchen were killed on Monday night when their convoy delivering food was struck in Deir al-Balah. The incident led the US-based organization to suspend its operations in Gaza. "I want to be very clear--the strike was not carried out with the intention of harming WCK aid workers. It was a mistake that followed a misidentification--at night during a war in complex conditions. *—PTI*

Pak: About 10M at risk of slipping into poverty

ISLAMABAD, 3 APRIL

The World Bank has painted a grim economic picture of Pakistan in its biannual report, cautioning that over 10 million more people are at risk of descending into poverty in the cash-strapped country.

The Washington-based lender's apprehension comes from a sluggish economic growth rate of 1.8 per cent coupled with soaring inflation, a staggering 26 per cent in the current fiscal year. The World Bank's biannual Pakistan Development Outlook report indicated that the country is set to miss almost all major macroeconomic targets.

The international lender said the country is anticipated to fall short of its primary budget target, remaining in deficit for three consecutive years, contrary to the International Monetary Fund's stipulations mandating a surplus. Sayed Murtaza Muzaffari, lead author of the report, said despite a board-based yet nascent economic recovery, poverty alleviation efforts remain insufficient.

The economic growth is projected to stagnate at a paltry 1.8 per cent while maintaining the poverty rate at around 40 per cent, with approximately 98 million Pakistanis already grappling with poverty, the World Bank report said.

The report said that the poor and vulnerable are likely to have benefited from the windfall gain in agricultural output but these gains were offset by continued high inflation and limited wage growth in other sectors that employ many of the poor, such as construction, trade, and transportation.

The wages of daily labourers increased only five per cent in nominal terms during the first quarter of this fiscal year when the inflation was above 30 per cent, it said. The persisting cost-of-living crisis coupled with rising transportation costs could potentially lead to an increase in out-of-school children and delayed medical treatments, particularly for worse-off families, warned the World Bank. *—PTI*

The economic growth is projected to stagnate at a paltry 1.8 per cent

PHOTO: UNICEF

- The Washington-based lender's apprehension comes from a sluggish economic growth rate of 1.8 per cent coupled with soaring inflation, a staggering 26 per cent

Senegal swears in Africa's youngest leader as Prez

DAKAR, 3 APRIL

Senegal inaugurated Africa's youngest elected leader as president on Tuesday, as the 44-year-old and previously little-known Bassirou Diomaye Faye completed a dramatic ascent from prison to palace within weeks.

Hours later, Ousmane Sonko, the popular Opposition figure who helped catapult him to victory, was named as the country's new prime minister.

Last month's election tested Senegal's reputation as a stable democracy in West Africa, a region rocked in recent years by coups and attempted coups. Both Faye and Sonko were released from prison less than two weeks before the vote following a political amnesty announced by outgoing President Macky Sall.

Their arrests had sparked months of protests and concerns that Sall would seek a third term in office despite term limits. Rights groups said dozens were killed and about 1,000 were jailed. In his first speech as president, Faye remembered those killed and arrested during the protests and promised to deliver greater sovereignty for Senegal while working to build prosperity. *—AP*

Ukraine also lowered the military conscription age from 27 to 25 in an effort to replenish its depleted ranks after more than two years of war following Russia's full-scale invasion

PHOTO: AP/PTI

Ukraine lowers combat call-up age to boost numbers

KYIV, 3 APRIL

Ukrainian forces had hoped to take back swathes of territory gained by Russia as well as cutting off Russian supply lines to Crimea. Not only that Ukraine also lowered the military conscription age from 27 to 25 in an effort to replenish its depleted ranks after more than two years of war following Russia's full-scale invasion.

It was not immediately clear why Zelenskyy took so long to sign the measure into law. He didn't make any public comment about it, and officials did not say how many new soldiers the country expected to gain or for which units.

Kyiv's counter-offensive ground to a halt at the start of winter and there are fears that Russian forces could outgun Ukraine. Last year, Ukrainian Gen Oleksandr Tarnavskyi warned troops had already been forced to downsize some military operations because of a drop-off in foreign aid.

Ukraine has relied heavily on Western supplies, particularly on deliveries of long-range missiles and air defence systems.

However, billions of pounds of US and EU aid have been held up amid political wrangles. Russian President Vladimir Putin has said more than 6,00,000 of his troops are fighting in Ukraine, but has not revealed how many have lost their lives there.

A classified US intelligence report released in December estimated that 3,15,000 Russian soldiers had been either killed or wounded since the war began - which it said was almost 90 per cent of Russia's military personnel at the start of the invasion. *—BBC News*

- It was not immediately clear why Zelenskyy took so long to sign the measure into law. He didn't make any public comment about it, and officials did not say how many new soldiers the country expected to gain or for which units

Workers had warning before bridge collapsed

BALTIMORE, 3 APRIL

In the moments before the cargo ship Dali rammed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge and sent it crumbling into the water, a flurry of urgent warnings crackled over radios and enabled police to block traffic from getting on the span, likely saving lives.

But those warnings seemingly didn't reach the six construction workers who were killed in last week's collapse of the Baltimore bridge. Their deaths have raised questions about whether the construction company took proper precautions, including keeping a safety boat nearby that might have been able to warn them at least a few seconds before impact. Federal regulations require construction companies to keep such boats, commonly known as skiffs, on hand whenever crews are working over waterways, safety experts told The Associated Press. There is no indication that the construction company, Brawner Builders, had a rescue boat on the water or ready to be launched as the bridge fell. "If you're working over a bridge like that, the standard interpretation doesn't give you an option," said Janine McCartney, a safety engineer for HHC Safety Engineering Services Inc. "The skiff is required, period."

Coast Guard representatives and other officials said they were unaware of any Brawner boat in the water at the time of the 26 March collapse. And satellite images from around the time of the collapse appeared to show no skiff in the river near the bridge. *—AP*

Aerial view of cargo ship Dali stuck under the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge

PHOTO: AP/PTI

More than 53K flee Haiti due to violence

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 3 APRIL

More than 53,000 people have fled Haiti's capital in less than three weeks, the vast majority to escape unrelenting gang violence, according to a United Nations report released Tuesday.

More than 60 per cent are headed to Haiti's rural southern region, which worries UN officials. "Our humanitarian colleagues emphasised that these departments do not have sufficient infrastructure, and host communities do not have sufficient resources, to cope with the large number of people fleeing Port-au-Prince," said UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

The southern region already hosts more than 1,16,000 Haitians who previously left Port-au-Prince, according to the report by the UN's International Organisation for Migration.

The exodus from the capital of some 3 million people began shortly after powerful gangs launched a series of attacks on government institutions at the end of February.

Gunmen have burned police stations, opened fire on the main international airport that remains closed and stormed Haiti's two biggest prisons, releasing more than 4,000 inmates.

More than 1,500 people have been reported killed up to 22 March, and another 17,000 have been left homeless, according to the UN.

Among the rare travellers trying to head north instead of south from the capital were Marjorie Michelle-Jean, a 42-year-old street vendor, and her two children, ages 4 and 7. *—PTI*

PRESIDENT PRIMARIES

Biden and Trump win four more states

WASHINGTON, 3 APRIL

US President Joe Biden and his Republican rival and predecessor Donald Trump have easily won their presidential primaries in four more states as they are set for a 2020 rematch in November. Hundreds of delegates were up for grabs in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York and the crucial battleground state of Wisconsin. Multiple names remained on the presidential ballots in the four states, though neither Trump, 77, nor Biden, 81, faced any major challenger.

In all the four states where the primaries were held Tuesday, Trump bagged more than 75 per cent of the votes, while Biden, a Democrat, received more than 80 per cent of the votes. Trump with four wins now has 1,860 delegates. Biden has so far won 3,030 delegates as against the minimum requirement of 1,968 delegates. Biden and Trump have already amassed enough delegates to win their respective nominations. But the turnout could provide more clues about the election on 5 November. Their rematch is expected to mirror the 2020 campaign, though Trump will run this time under the spectre of 91 felony charges.

Multiple names remained on the presidential ballots in the four states, though neither Trump nor Biden faced any major challenger

PHOTO: PTI

Their nominations will be confirmed at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee in July and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August. Connecticut and Rhode Island allowed voters to vote "uncommitted" in the primary, while Wisconsin offered a similar option of "uninstructed delegation".

There was an effort in Wisconsin on Tuesday by anti-Biden protesters to encourage people in the Democratic primary to pick the "uninstructed" option in opposition to Biden's policies on the Israel-Hamas war. These victories offer insights into base voter enthusiasm for the upcoming 2020 rematch, particularly in Wisconsin, a crucial November battleground. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 3 paise to close at 83.45 against US dollar

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The rupee depreciated by 3 paise to close at 83.45 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, weighed down by elevated crude oil prices in international markets and persistent foreign fund outflows. A muted trend in domestic equities also dented investor sentiments, forex traders said At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.36 and touched an intraday low of 83.45 and a high of 83.36 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.45 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of 3 paise from its previous close The rupee on Tuesday consolidated in a narrow range and settled 3 paise lower at 83.42 against the American currency. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength was trading 0.01 per cent lower at 104.80. *—PTI*

Gold jumps ₹830 to reach new peak per 10 grams

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Gold prices jumped by Rs 830 to reach a new peak of Rs 69,200 per 10 grams on Wednesday amid a rally in precious metal rates in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. This is the second time that yellow metal prices have hit an all-time high in this week. In the previous trade, the precious metal had closed at Rs 68,370 per 10 grams. Silver prices also surged by Rs 1,700 to Rs 80,700 per kg. It had finished at Rs 79,000 per kg in the previous close. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 69,200 per 10 grams, up by Rs 830, taking a bullish trend in the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at COMEX was trading at USD 2,275 per ounce, up by USD 20 from the previous close. Additionally, silver was also trading higher at USD 26.25 per ounce. In the previous session, it had settled at USD 25.55 per ounce. *—PTI*

Air India launches customer loyalty programme

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Members of the programme will now be able to avail the benefits and collect points based on the new structure Private carrier Air India on Wednesday launched a revamped loyalty programme with a simplified structure, offering more rewards and added benefits to its customers. In its first overhaul in more than a decade, the revamped loyalty programme -- Flying Returns -- moves away from the legacy model of miles-based collection of points to a fairer, more equitable spend-based approach, Air India said in a statement. Members of the programme will now be able to avail the benefits and collect points based on the new structure, starting Wednesday, it said without divulging the number of the existing members. *—PTI*

India becomes Suzuki's second market to cross 3cr

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

India has become the second country for Suzuki Motor Corporation to cross cumulative production of 3 crore units, reaching the milestone even faster than it achieved in its home nation, the Japanese carmaker said on Wednesday. The company's subsidiary, Maruti Suzuki India, has achieved accumulated automobile production of 3 crore units in India by the end of March 2024, Suzuki Motor Corporation said in a statement. "India becomes the second country after Japan in which Suzuki has reached this milestone, and the fastest country to reach 30 million units in just 40 years and 4 months since starting production in December 1983, breaking the record of 55 years and 2 months in Japan," it said. *—PTI*

Adani is India's 1st with 10K MW renewable energy capacity

Firm aims for 45 GW renewable energy by 2030

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Adani Green Energy Ltd on Wednesday said it has commissioned 2,000 MW of solar capacity at the giant Khavda solar park in Gujarat that has made it the first company in India with over 10,000 MW of renewable energy capacity.

The company now has an operating portfolio of 10,934 MW, largest in India.

It has brought 2,848 MW renewables capacity on stream in FY24, according to a company statement.

AGEL's operational portfolio consists of 7,393 MW solar, 1,401 MW wind and 2,140 MW wind-solar hybrid capacity.

The firm is aiming for 45 GW renewable energy by 2030.

AGEL's 10,934 MW operational portfolio will power more than 5.8 million homes and avoid about 21 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions annually, the statement said.

"We are proud to be India's first das hazari in the renewables space," said Gautam Adani, Chairman of the Adani Group.

It has brought 2,848 MW renewables capacity on stream in FY24 *PHOTO: ADANI GREEN*

"In less than a decade, Adani Green Energy has not just envisioned a greener future but has actualised it, growing from a mere idea to explore clean energy to achieving a phenomenal 10,000 MW in installed capacity. This achievement is a demonstration of the rapidity and scale at which the Adani Group aims to facilitate India's transition to clean, reliable and affordable energy," he said.

"In our drive towards 45,000 MW (45 GW) by 2030, we are building the world's largest renewable energy plant in Khavda -- a 30,000 MW project unparalleled on the global stage. AGEL is not just setting benchmarks for the world but redefining them," he said.

AGEL also said that its operating portfolio is certified 'single-use plastic free', 'zero waste-to-landfill' and 'water positive for plants with more than 200 MW capacity'.

Built on 538 square kilometres, Khavda plant is five times the size of Paris and almost as large as Mumbai.

AGEL has operationalised 2,000 MW cumulative solar capacity (i.e. over 6 per cent of the planned 30,000 MW) within 12 months of commencing work.

Work at Khavda continues at a fast pace, with AGEL leveraging the project execution capabilities of Adani Infra, the manufacturing expertise of Adani New Industries Limited, the operational excellence of Adani Infrastructure Management Services Ltd. and the robust supply chain of our strategic partners, it said.

—PTI

Mkts end lower amid mixed global cues, profit-booking

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty settled lower for the second straight session on Wednesday due to profit-booking in select banking and auto stocks amid mixed trends from the global markets and outflow of foreign funds.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 27.09 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 73,876.82. During the day, the index oscillated between the high of 74,151.21 and the low of 73,757.23.

The broader NSE Nifty declined 18.65 points or 0.08 per cent to 22,434.65, with 30 components of the 50-share benchmark ending with losses.

"Nifty remained volatile throughout the day after an initial weak start due to negative global cues," said Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst, LKP Securities.

He further said that the index may trend towards 22,650. "Support is positioned at 22,350 on the lower end."

Among the Sensex constituents, as many as 16 stocks closed with losses with Nestle India, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finserve, Titan and JSW Steel being the major laggards. Index major Reliance, Hindustan Unilever, Maruti and Tata Steel also declined due to selling pressure.

In contrast, NTPC, TCS, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance bucked the trend and ended the day in green.Axis Bank, Bharti Airtel, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors also defied the trend.

Sensex declined by 110.64 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 73,903.91 *PHOTO: PTI*

BSE MidCap rose 0.63 per cent, while smallcap index gained 1.19 per cent and the largecap fell marginally by 0.07 per cent.Asian markets were trading in negative with Hong Kong's Hang Seng and Japan's Nikkei 225 losing sharply by 1.22 per cent and 0.97 per cent, respectively. China's Shanghai Composite was trading at a loss of 0.18 per cent.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.31 per cent to USD 88.20 a barrel. *—PTI*

GOVT WAIVES EXPORT DUTY ON KALANAMAK RICE

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

The government has removed duty on the Kalanamak variety of rice for exports of up to 1,000 tonnes through six specified customs stations.

The duty on overseas shipments of Kalanamak rice was 20 per cent.

According to a notification by the Finance Ministry, the duty waiver on the export of up to 1,000 tonnes of this variety of rice will come into effect from Wednesday.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) on Tuesday had allowed exports of up to 1,000 tonnes of Kalanamak rice through specified customs stations.

Kalanamak is a variety of non-basmati rice, exports of which were earlier prohibited.

Exports of this variety of rice are allowed through six customs stations - Varanasi Air Cargo; JNCH (Jawaharlal Nehru Customs House), Maharashtra; CH (customs house) Kandla, Gujarat; LCS (land customs station) Nepalgunj Road; LCS Sonauli; and LCS Barhni. *—PTI*

RBI unlikely to cut rates, to maintain status quo

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

As FY25 first Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting begins, it seems the Reserve Bank of India is unlikely to cut rates.

Experts believe the central bank is very likely to maintain the status quo on interest rates along with caution on inflation and the geo-political outlook

MPC maintained the status quo on policy rates and stance in its last review in February 2024.

The decision however was not unanimous and one member has recommended a rate cut of 25 basis points and policy change stand to neutral.Since the last policy, rating agencies have revised India's growth forecast upwards. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, said on Saturday that India will grow over 8 per cent in FY24. Inflation has dropped and under the range of RBO comfort zone, CPI inflation was 5.1 per cent in February 2024 from over 5.5 per cent in December 2023.

The core CPI inflation excluding food and beverages was at a low of 3.5 per cent in February 2024.

Food inflation at above 7 per cent was a concern, but with a recent cut in the prices of petrol, diesel and LPG inflation is likely to further fall and may come below 5 per cent.Experts believe that RBI is unlikely to change its policy stance before the August 2024 MPC review. US Fed has also recently indicated that they are not in a hurry to cut rates. All these suggest that the RBI too is unlikely to go for a rate cut before the October 2024 policy. *—ANI*

IndiGo, Malaysia Airlines seals codeshare partnership

MUMBAI, 3 APRIL

Malaysia Airlines has inked an initial pact with domestic no-frills carrier IndiGo for a codeshare partnership to boost connectivity between the two countries.

Moreover, a cooperation agreement between the two airlines will enable both carriers to provide customers with more options and flexibility for seamless travel between Malaysia and India, IndiGo said in a statement.

Through this cooperation, Malaysia Airlines will be able to strengthen its connectivity with India, as the marketing carrier on IndiGo operated flights, while IndiGo customers will get to explore more Southeast Asia destinations through Malaysia Airlines' extensive network, it said. This reciprocal arrangement will allow both carriers to provide seamless connections to their customers, besides enabling them to enjoy an integrated travel itinerary among other facilities, IndiGo said.Malaysia Airlines currently operates 71 weekly flights to nine key hubs in India, including New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Ahmedabad, Amritsar and Trivandrum.

"With India being our largest international market, we are delighted to enter this MoU with IndiGo to further widen our reach beyond the nine hubs we currently operate within India," said Izham Ismail, Group Managing Director of Malaysia Aviation Group. *—PTI*

Through this cooperation, Malaysia Airlines will be able to strengthen its connectivity with India *PHOTO: PTI*

POST CYBER ATTACK

Federal report raps Microsoft for shoddy security

BOSTON, 3 APRIL

In a scathing indictment of Microsoft corporate security and transparency, a Biden administration-appointed review board issued a report Tuesday saying "a cascade of errors" by the tech giant let state-backed Chinese cyber operators break into email accounts of senior US officials including Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

The Cyber Safety Review Board, created in 2021 by executive order, describes shoddy cybersecurity practices, a lax corporate culture and a lack of sincerity about the company's knowledge of the targeted breach, which affected multiple US agencies that deal with China.

The panel urged Microsoft to put on hold adding features to its cloud computing environment *PHOTO: PTI*

It concluded that "Microsoft's security culture was inadequate and requires an overhaul" given the company's ubiquity and critical role in the global technology ecosystem. Microsoft products "underpin essential services that support national security, the foundations of our economy, and public health and safety."

The panel made sweeping recommendations, including urging Microsoft to put on hold adding features to its cloud computing environment until "substantial security improvements have been made."

In a statement, Microsoft said it would "continue to harden all our systems against attack and implement even more robust sensors and logs to help us detect and repel the cyber-armies of our adversaries."

In all, the state-backed Chinese hackers broke into the Microsoft Exchange Online email of 22 organisations and more than 500 individuals around the world accessing some cloud-based email boxes for at least six weeks and downloading some 60,000 emails from the State Department alone, the 34-page report said.

Three think tanks and four foreign government entities, including Britain's National Cyber Security Centre, were among those compromised, it said.

—AP

AMID CANCELLATIONS

This comes a day after the full-service carrier on Monday cancelled over 50 flights due to non-availability of pilots *PHOTO: PTI*

Vistara meets unhappy pilots to resolve crisis

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

- Additionally, DGCA officials are monitoring the situation to ensure compliance of above mentioned CAR and minimise passenger inconvenience

Vistara Airlines management has convened a meeting with pilots On Wednesday to tackle the ongoing crisis regarding the pilot shortage, stemming from pay cuts implemented after new flying hours' regulations came into effect recently.

According to airline sources, "CEO Vinod Kannan, along with HR representatives, is scheduled to meet with pilots this afternoon to address these issues."

Kannan is also in charge of integrating Vistara with Air India. The pilots are protesting a cut in their salaries post-merger with Air India.

This week alone, Vistara has been forced to cancel over 100 flights due to the unavailability of pilots. A significant number of Vistara pilots have taken sick leave in mass following the announcement of new salary rules, which coincided with the merger with Air India.

On Tuesday, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) asked Vistara Airlines to submit daily reports about flight operations and follow the Civil Aviation Regulations (CAR).

The airline company is responsible for providing timely refunds to passengers and keeping them informed about flight status and timing.

"The airline has also been asked to ensure that the relevant provisions of CAR Section-3, Series M, Part-IV on "Facilities to be provided to passengers by airlines due to denied boarding, cancellation of flights and delays in flights" are complied with, like advance information, an option of refund, compensation (if applicable), etc. to the passengers," DGCA said in a statement.

Additionally, DGCA officials are monitoring the situation to ensure compliance of above mentioned CAR and minimise passenger inconvenience.

The Airline in a statement on Tuesday had said "We have had a significant number of flight cancellations and delays in the past few days due to various reasons including crew unavailability. We acknowledge and are deeply concerned about the inconvenience this has caused to our customers.... We have decided to temporarily reduce the number of flights we operate, to ensure adequate connectivity across our network.... Furthermore, we are offering alternate flight options or refunds to affected customer, as applicable." *—ANI*

MANGO OUTPUT TO SEE 14% RISE THIS YEAR

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

India's overall mango production may increase by about 14 per cent to 24 million tonnes this year, ICAR-Central Institute for Subtropical Horticulture Director T Damodaran said on Wednesday.

The India Meteorological Department's (IMD) forecast of a heat wave in April-May period may not have a significant impact on the mango yield, provided farmers take care of irrigation during May to reduce excessive fruit dropping, he said.

In its latest summer forecast, IMD has predicted harsher spells of heat waves that could last between 10-20 days instead of the usual two to four days.

Above normal heatwave days are likely to occur over most parts of the south peninsula, central India, east India and plains of northwest India.

The prospects of mango crop are good as of now. Total production could increase to 24 million tonnes in the 2023-24 crop year (July-June), as against 21 million tonnes in 2022-23, he said.

The mango output is seen to be bumper in South India, which contributes 50 per cent of the total country's production. Last year, Southern states faced 15 per cent loss due to weather aberrations. However, the situation is better this year, he added. *—PTI*

Pandya's case could be handled 'better': Shastri

Ravi Shastri also advised Hardik Pandya to stay calm

NEW DELHI, 3 APRIL

Former India coach Ravi Shastri feels the fan backlash towards Hardik Pandya could have been avoided had Mumbai Indians shown "clarity in communication" while announcing him as captain.

Shastri also advised Pandya to stay calm and weather the storm with solid performances.

"This is not the Indian cricket team that's playing. This is franchise cricket. They have paid top dollar. They are the bosses. It's their entitlement as to who they want as captain. Okay, where I think this could have been handled better was with more clarity in communication," Shastri told Star Sports' 'Cricket Live Show'.

"If you wanted Hardik Pandya as captain, then say that we are looking at the future. We are looking to build. Rohit has done a fabulous job, as everyone knows, and we want him to help out Hardik in these next three years as the team progresses.

India Men's team former head coach Ravi Shastri expects the tide to turn once Mumbai Indians start winning **PHOTO: ANI**

"That communication, that clarity should have come out a little more for all this to die down. So it's not a case of you saying, 'No, we don't want Rohit Sharma,' or 'He was treated badly,' and all the things that are coming out in social media," he added.

Shastri expects the tide to turn once Mumbai Indians start winning.

The team is currently on a three-match losing streak.

"So, my advice to Hardik would be to be calm, patient, ignore, and just focus on your game. Get a couple of performances going. Mumbai Indians is a terrific side. If they get on a roll, they win three or four matches on the trot, everything will subside," he said.

Former Australia batter Mathew Hayden said it is not fair to judge Pandya based on just three matches. *—PTI*

Sixes galore as KKR amass 272/7

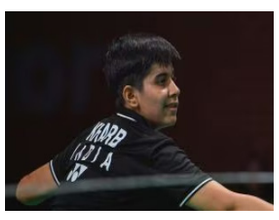
VISAKHAPATNAM, 3 APRIL

Sunil Narine produced a six-hitting exhibition en route to a blistering 85 while young Angkrish Raghuvanshi scored a fifty on his IPL batting debut as Kolkata Knight Riders posted an imposing 272 for seven against Delhi Capitals here on Wednesday. Continuing his explosive run, Narine punished all Delhi bowlers alike, sending the ball over the boundary rope seven times. He also hit seven fours in his 39-ball stay. The Capitals were guilty of dropping him on 53 and Narine made his opponents suffer as he notched his highest-ever score in T20 cricket. *—PTI*

India to play T20I series against B'desh in Sylhet

SYLHET, 3 APRIL

India women's team will travel to Bangladesh for a five-match T20I series. Sylhet will host all the matches. This will be India's second tour of Bangladesh in the last two years. Last year, the 'Women in Blue' played three 20-over matches against Bangladesh and Harmanpreet Kaur's side won the series 2-1. The upcoming T20I series will kick off India's preparation for the upcoming T20 World Cup. The women's 20-over World Cup will kick off in September-October and will be played in Bangladesh. India hold the third place in women's T20I rankings. Bangladesh are placed ninth. In the 2023 T20 World Cup, India qualified for the semi-final and lost to Australia. The 'Women in Blue' qualified for the upcoming T20 World Cup after finishing as one of the top six teams in the last edition of the tournament. *—ANI*



Shuttler Kharb enters Kazakhstan pre-quarters

ASTANA, 3 APRIL

Young Indian shuttler Anmol Kharb overcame a strong challenge from countrymate Malvika Bansod to enter the pre-quarterfinals of the Kazakhstan International Challenge on Wednesday. The 17-year-old Anmol, winner of the Badminton Asia Team Championships gold and the reigning national champion, overcame Malvika's challenge 21-13, 22-20 in 59 minutes. The world No. 333 will take on Indonesia's 21-year-old shutter Nurani Ratu Azzahra in the last-16 round. Earlier, in the two qualification rounds, Anmol got a walkover from Kamila Smagulova of Kazakhstan before beating Cassey Rynn Rompog of Malaysia 21-19, 21-9 to secure a place in main draw. *—PTI*

Archer bowling at 'exceptional pace': Sussex coach

LONDON, 3 APRIL

Jofra Archer is once again cranking up "exceptional pace" following a series of injury setbacks since 2019 and is on England selectors' radar for the T20 World Cup this year. Archer's county side Sussex's coach Paul Farbrace said that the 29-year-old is bowling with the likes of England's Ollie Robinson and the West Indies' Jayden Seales in training and the plan is to make him ready for the showpiece event. "Last week in practice there was a spell where Oliver (Robinson) had bowled, Jayden bowled and then Jofra came into the middle and bowled -- and he came marching out and bowled exceptionally quick," Farbrace was quoted as saying by The Telegraph on Tuesday. *—PTI*

T20I series vs Pak: Bracewell set to be the NZ skipper

AUCKLAND, 3 APRIL

With a host of top players competing in the IPL, New Zealand will be led for the first time by all-rounder Michael Bracewell in a five-match away T20I series against Pakistan later this month. The likes of Trent Boult, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitch Santner and Kane Williamson are playing in the IPL, while Tim Southee, the team's leading T20 wicket-taker since the last T20 World Cup, has not been considered following a busy playing schedule across formats. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

GUJARAT TITANS vs PUNJAB KINGS

Time: 7.30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Narendra Modi Stadium, Ahmedabad

Punjab batters to face challenge against GT

AHMEDABAD, 3 APRIL

Bruised by Mayank Yadav's scorching pace, Punjab Kings' batters will face an altogether different challenge when Gujarat Titans' bowling unit tries to take the pace off deliveries on a slightly tricky Motera track in their IPL match here on Thursday.

The Kings have lost their last two away games and another slip-up against Titans will lead to further loss of momentum which tends to shift very quickly due to lack of turnaround time.

Titans, on the other hand, are brimming with confidence after beating Sunrisers Hyderabad comprehensively by seven wickets in their last game.

In the previous match, Kings were completely undone by Mayank's speed and most of their top-order batters looked ill-equipped to face the fast bowler, who was regularly clocking 150 clicks and more importantly, aiming to bowl into the body of the batters.

However, the scenario will be completely different when veteran Mohit Sharma comes calling at the back-end, presenting a palate of variations. *—PTI*

INDIAN SUPER LEAGUE

Players of Kerala Blasters FC and East Bengal FC vie for the ball during match in Kochi on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Cristiano Ronaldo nets another hat trick in Saudi

ABHA, 3 APRIL

Cristiano Ronaldo notched his second hat trick in the space of 72 hours as Al-Nassr routed Abha 8-0 in the Saudi Pro League on Tuesday.

The five-time Ballon D'Or winner scored three goals and recorded two assists in the first half for the nine-time Saudi Arabian champions.

The hat trick was his third of the league season following his treble in Saturday's 5-1 win over Al-Tai. The Portugal star leads the league with 29 goals. Ronaldo's first two goals Tuesday came from free-kicks. With 11 minutes on the clock, he opened the scoring with a low shot from a central position just outside the area. The second came 10 minutes later when he curled the ball around the wall from the left side.

Ronaldo then assisted Sadio Mané for Al-Nassr's third just after the half-hour, pulling the ball back from the left for the former Liverpool forward to score.

Three minutes before the break, Ronaldo then completed the hat trick with a beautiful chip from outside the area as he ran toward goal.

The hat trick was his third of the league season following his treble in Saturday's 5-1 win over Al-Tai **PHOTO: X/AINASSR FC**

There was still enough time in the first-half for Ronaldo to slip the ball to his right for Abdulmajeed Al-Sulayhim to score into an open goal from close range.

The star was taken off at the break though Al-Nassr continued to find the target. Saudi Arabian international Abdulrahman Ghareeb added a sixth soon after the restart and substitute Abdulaziz Al-Aliwa scored two more.

Despite the win, Al-Nassr is still in second, 12 points behind runaway leader Al-Hilal with eight games remaining. Al-Hilal announced earlier in the day that striker Aleksandar Mitrovic, second behind Ronaldo with 22 goals, is likely to miss the rest of the season through injury. *—AP*

SL wins 2nd test to sweep series over Bangladesh

CHATTOGRAM, 3 APRIL

Fast bowler Lahiru Kumara claimed four wickets for 50 runs as Sri Lanka swept the two-test series against Bangladesh with a 192-run victory in the second match on Wednesday. Sri Lanka won the first test by 328 runs and with the series sweep maintained its record of not losing a test in Bangladesh. It won the earlier three-match T20 series 2-1 before losing the ODI series by same margin. Resuming Day 5 at 268-7 and needing 243 runs for an unlikely victory, Bangladesh was bowled out for 318 with Mehidy Hasan Miraz staying unbeaten on 81. Occasional bowler Kamindu Mendis, who took 3-32, got the breakthrough for the visitors in the fourth over of the day when he dismissed Taijul Islam, caught by Nishan Madushka at gully. But Mehidy raised his sixth test 50 off 62 balls, hitting Kamindu for a boundary. He batted aggressively to raise the prospect of his only second century but Hasan Mahmud and Syed Khaled Ahmed failed to give him support.

Both of the batters were dismissed by Kumara, leaving Mehidy 19 runs short of his century. He played 110 balls for his 81, including 14 fours. Sri Lanka posted 531 in its first innings with six batters getting past half-century marks, making it the highest total without any batters scoring a century. *—AP*

ENGLISH PREMIERE LEAGUE

ManU's Martinez, Lindelof ruled out for a month

MANCHESTER, 3 APRIL

Manchester United defenders Lisandro Martinez and Victor Lindelof have been ruled out of action for at least a month because of injuries, the club said Tuesday.

Argentina international Martinez suffered a calf strain in training and Lindelof hurt his hamstring in Saturday's 1-1 draw against Brentford.

United hopes both players will return before the end of the season, but their absences will likely hinder Erik ten Hag's attempt to secure Champions League qualification.

The United manager has had to contend with a slew of squad injuries this season, with Rasmus Hojlund, Mason Mount, Luke Shaw and Casemiro. Martinez has made just 11 appearances this season and only recently recovered from knee ligament damage. He was previously out for three months after undergoing surgery on his right foot for a metatarsal injury in October. *—AP*

Forest snapped a five-game winless run with a first-half onslaught **PHOTO:X/ NOTTINGHAM FOREST**

Nottingham Forest beat Fulham 3-1 in a thriller

NOTTINGHAM, 3 APRIL

Morgan Gibbs-White set up a goal and scored another to help Nottingham Forest push away from the relegation zone with a 3-1 victory over Fulham in the Premier League on Tuesday.

Forest snapped a five-game winless run with a first-half onslaught that prompted Fulham manager Marco Silva to make a triple substitution just past the half-hour mark. Callum Hudson-Odoi collected Gibbs-White's long through ball and scored in the ninth minute at the City Ground. Chris Wood doubled the lead 10 minutes later with a strike from distance with goalkeeper Bernd Leno playing just outside his 6-yard box. Looking for a spark, Silva sent on Willian for Harry Wilson; Tom Cairney for Sasa Lukic; and Adama Traoré for Alex Iwobi.

But it was Gibbs-White who struck next, taking a pass from Danilo and beating Leno with a shot to the far right corner in first-half stoppage time. Tosin Adarabioyo got Fulham on the board four minutes after the break with a header off a corner. *—AP*

Tottenham held 1-1 at West Ham to dent League hopes

LONDON, 3 APRIL

Tottenham missed the chance to overtake Aston Villa in the race for Champions League qualification after settling for a 1-1 draw at West Ham on Tuesday in the Premier League.

Brennan Johnson had given fifth-place Spurs an ideal start at London Stadium, but that was canceled out by Kurt Zouma's leveler in the 19th.

West Ham could have even gone on to win if Michail Antonio had been more ruthless with a second-half chance. The forward raced through on goal after an hour, but with only Guglielmo Vicario to beat, he fired straight at the Spurs goalkeeper. Spurs knew a big enough win would have seen it overtake fourth-place Villa on goal difference.

And that looked like a possibility when the visitors raced into an early lead after Timo Werner burst past Vladimir Coufal and played in Johnson to convert from close range.

But manager Ange Postecoglou was left frustrated when Jarrod Bowen's corner was turned in by an unmarked Zouma. The result left Tottenham two points behind Villa, having played the same number of games. *—AP*

MATCH-FIXING ROW

Brazilian clubs protest against US executive

SAO PAULO, 3 APRIL

Brazilian club Palmeiras filed a complaint against John Textor at the country's top sports court on Tuesday after the American executive made allegations of match-fixing.

Textor, whose Eagle Football runs top-flight Brazilian club Botafogo, has accused defending champion Palmeiras of being the beneficiary of a match-fixing scheme.

Palmeiras said in a statement that it filed a complaint because of Textor's comments this week claiming that nine players of Fortaleza and Sao Paulo FC were suspicious underperformers in two Brazilian league matches against Palmeiras in the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

Botafogo has accused defending champion Palmeiras **PHOTO: NEWSDAY**

Both Fortaleza and Sao Paulo FC said Monday night they are considering legal action against Textor.Botafogo last year squandered a 13-point lead to lose the national league title. Textor said his claims are based on an artificial intelligence data-driven report he received, but he has refused to give more details about it. A message sent to Botafogo seeking comment from the club or Textor was not answered.

Palmeiras said it wants the American businessman to be fined and suspended. The Sao Paulo-based club added it will "not speak again about the bizarre attempt of the ludicrous soccer executive to justify their loss of the 2023 Brazilian championship." *—AP*